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SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 1, No. 2

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June, 1939

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An unimaginative civilization pronounces its own doom in defiance of Dr. Bronzan's "wild theories"! But he and his brave companions set out upon a search for the proverbial needle in a haystack—where the haystack is the entire Universe!—and he fights to save humanity, despite itself!

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CASH PRIZE CONTEST!

A MISDATING in our last issue placed the closing date of our Cash Prize Contest much too early to allow all of our readers to participate. Therefore, the Editors of SCIENCE FICTION are extending the time for this contest until July 1, 1939—at which date all entries must be in our offices.

We want to make certain that we are always giving you the very best stories in science-fiction. In order to please you by presenting a magazine filled with A-1 material each and every issue, it is necessary for us to find out just what you like.

Some fantasy fans believe that science-fiction should stress science—facts, theories, and general discussions—while others think that its primary function is to stimulate the imagination, and not to educate its followers; that the science in the stories should be at a minimum and never allowed to dominate the themes.

Here is your chance to voice your opinions on science-fiction, and at the same time, win a cash award for your effort. See how *easy* it is!

We want you to submit an essay to us—anywhere from fifty to five hundred words in length—on the subject, "The essentials of good science-fiction." That's all there is to it!

There will be eleven prizes for best entries (two added to those announced last issue):

FIRST PRIZE: Twenty-five (\$25.00) dollars in cash.

SECOND PRIZE: Fifteen (\$15.00) dollars in cash.

THIRD AND FOURTH PRIZES: Each five (\$5.00) dollars in cash.

FIFTH AND SIXTH PRIZES: Each one original cover painting by Paul.

SEVENTH TO ELEVENTH PRIZES: Each a one-year subscription to SCIENCE FICTION.

All entries must be legibly written, either by hand or typewriter, on one side only of 8½x11 in. paper. The Editors of SCIENCE FICTION will be the sole judges in this contest, and entries must be in the editorial offices by Saturday, July 1, 1939. The judges cannot enter into correspondence with the contestants, nor will any contributions be returned. Address your entry to Editor, SCIENCE FICTION, 60 Hudson Street, New York City. Results of this contest will be announced in an early issue of SCIENCE FICTION. Everyone is eligible to enter except employees of Blue Ribbon Magazines, Inc., and their families.

Go to work now and write that essay! You can win as easily as anyone else. You don't have to use a lot of fancy language—nor must you have any special abilities. All you need is an interest in science-fiction.

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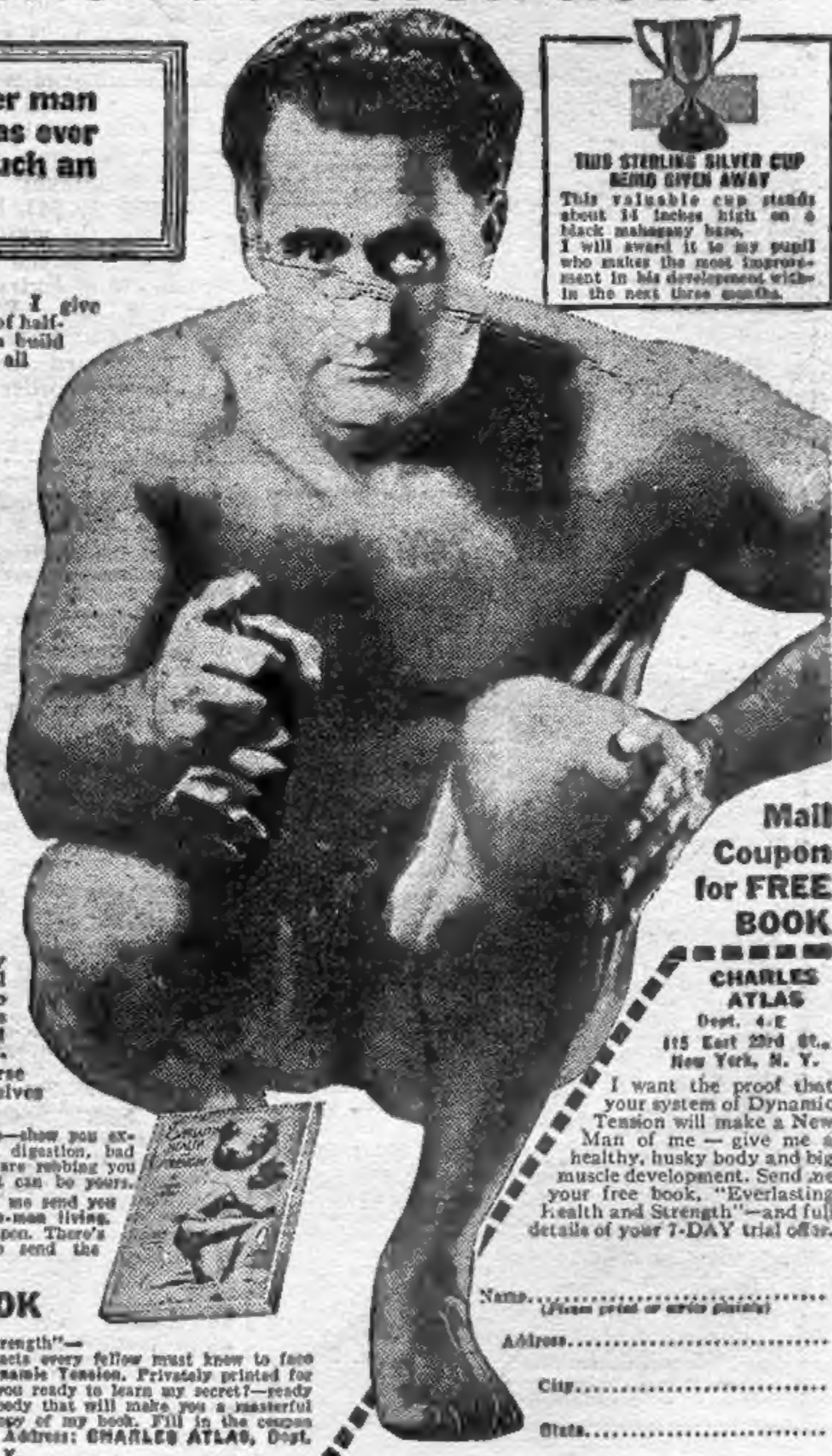
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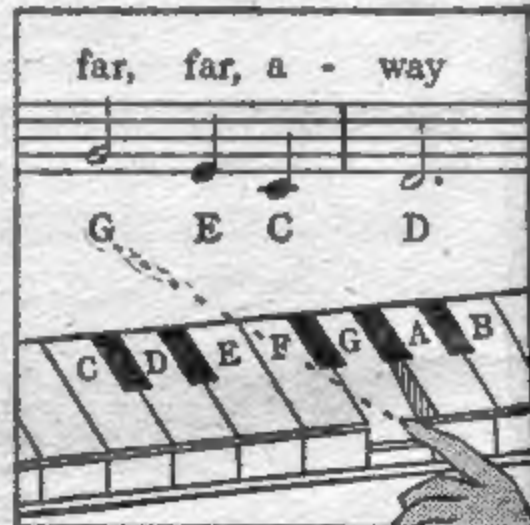
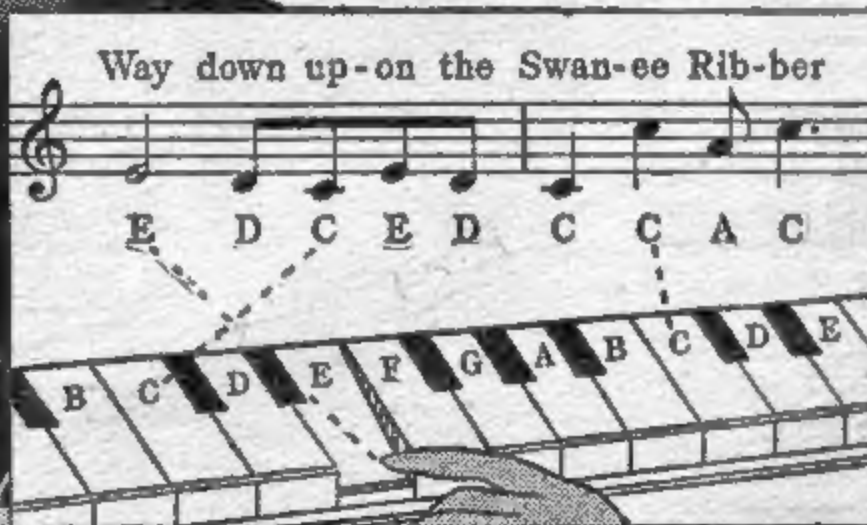
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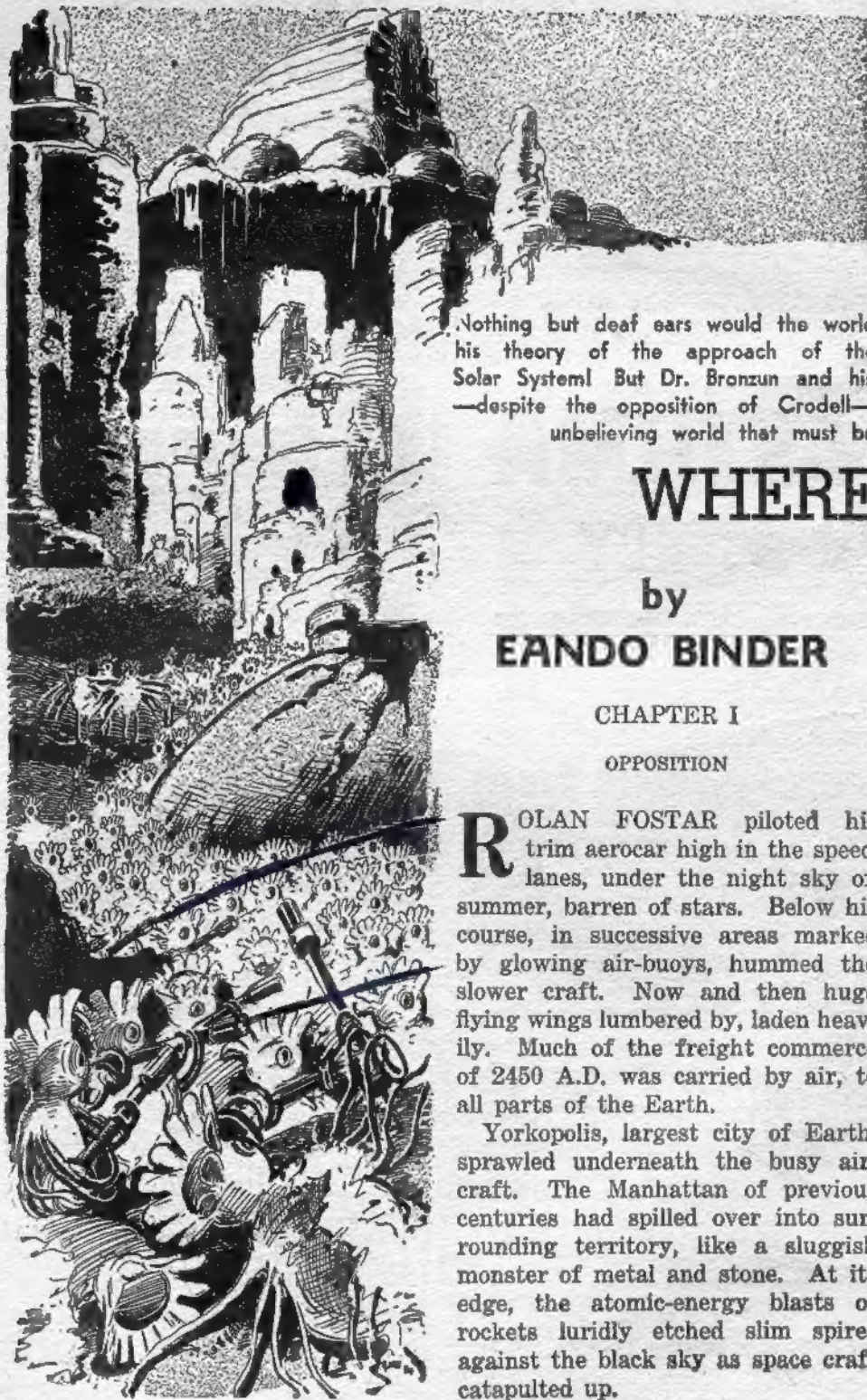
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Nothing but deaf ears would the world
his theory of the approach of the
Solar System! But Dr. Bronzun and his
—despite the opposition of Crodell—
unbelieving world that must be

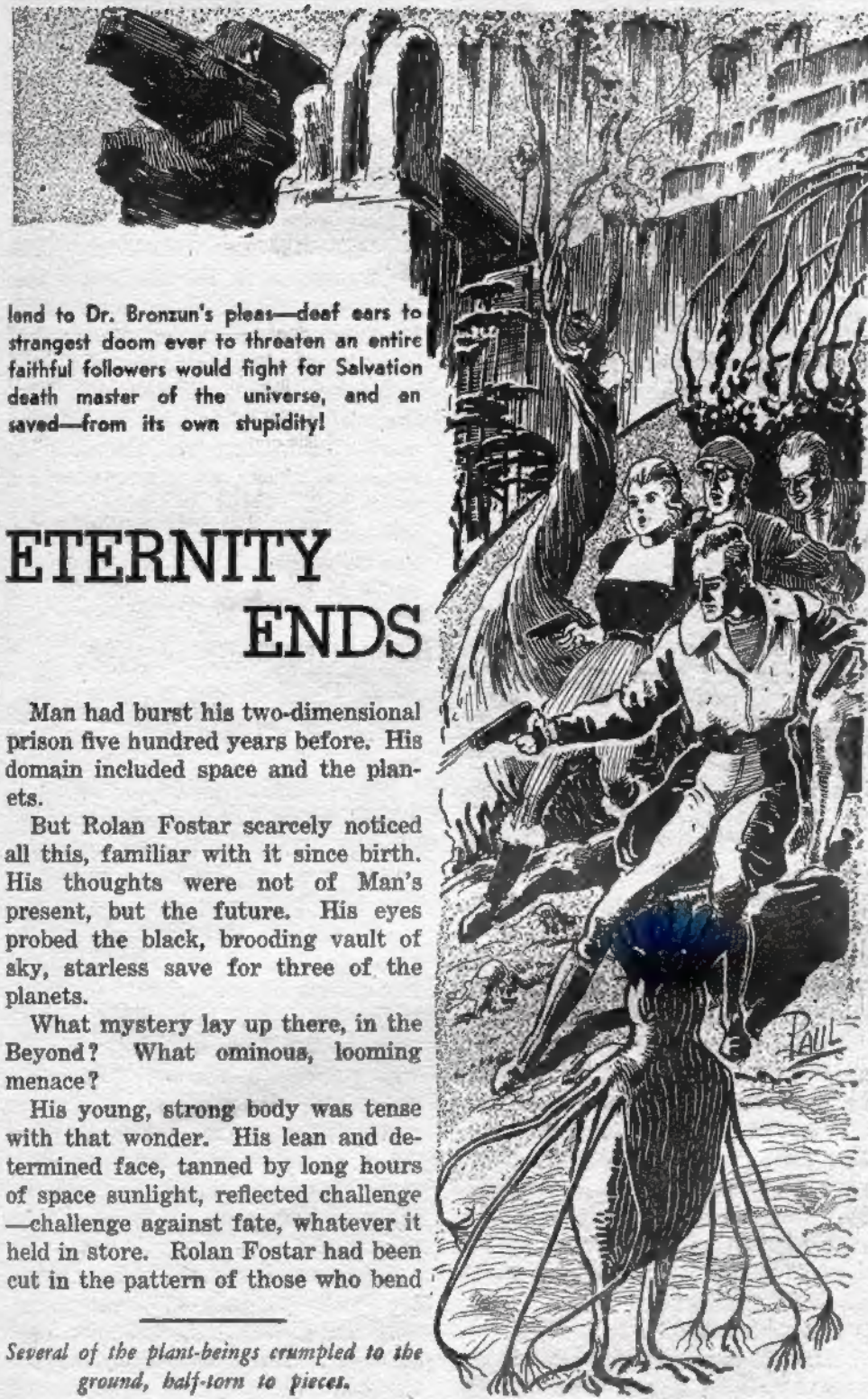
WHERE

by
EANDO BINDER

CHAPTER I OPPOSITION

ROLAN FOSTAR piloted his trim aerocar high in the speed lanes, under the night sky of summer, barren of stars. Below his course, in successive areas marked by glowing air-buoys, hummed the slower craft. Now and then huge flying wings lumbered by, laden heavily. Much of the freight commerce of 2450 A.D. was carried by air, to all parts of the Earth.

Yorkopolis, largest city of Earth, sprawled underneath the busy air-craft. The Manhattan of previous centuries had spilled over into surrounding territory, like a sluggish monster of metal and stone. At its edge, the atomic-energy blasts of rockets luridly etched slim spires against the black sky as space craft catapulted up.



lend to Dr. Bronzun's pleas—deaf ears to
strangest doom ever to threaten an entire
faithful followers would fight for Salvation
death master of the universe, and an
saved—from its own stupidity!

ETERNITY ENDS

Man had burst his two-dimensional prison five hundred years before. His domain included space and the planets.

But Rolan Fostar scarcely noticed all this, familiar with it since birth. His thoughts were not of Man's present, but the future. His eyes probed the black, brooding vault of sky, starless save for three of the planets.

What mystery lay up there, in the Beyond? What ominous, looming menace?

His young, strong body was tense with that wonder. His lean and determined face, tanned by long hours of space sunlight, reflected challenge—challenge against fate, whatever it held in store. Rolan Fostar had been cut in the pattern of those who bend

Several of the plant-beings crumpled to the ground, half-torn to pieces.

but never break. His clear blue eyes, calm but capable of fire, looked upon the cosmos as a vast proving-ground for human endeavor. His one creed was that the race could, and must go on, against all the obstacles of time, space, and destiny.

IN A FEW more minutes he had reached his destination, a towering edifice of Martian greenstone. It housed the offices of Interplanetary Real Estate Corporation, the largest of its kind in that age. Fostar brought his aerocar down deftly on the broad landing roof, and climbed out.

A uniformed attendant approached. "Your business, sir?" he asked politely.

"I'm from Dr. Bronzun's laboratory," stated Fostar. "Marten Crodell wishes to see me."

"I will inform him you are here. You may wait up here, or down below in the reception room, as you wish."

"I'll wait here," returned Fostar, striding toward the roof's parapet. He leaned on it, gazing down at the widespread city. But his eyes turned upward, as though to a magnet. Up there lay the Beyond, the last frontier of the known universe.

In the Beyond lay—nothing! Not even stars. Just garnet Mars glinted up there, and yellow Saturn and scintillant Venus, the latter already setting, following the sun. Through the dark night there would be only the two planets and the moon, which was just now rising. It loomed up like a great yellow lamp, shedding a pale glow.

But no stars!

Earth's night face was, at this season, looking directly out into the Beyond. Six months later, during winter, the night firmament would

be a blaze of stars, all those stars that lay back of the Earth and sun. For Earth was at the edge of the universe.

At the Edge of Space!

FOSTAR'S eye caught a slight movement in the shadows a few feet away. Startled, he looked into the face of a girl, as the moon's first beam crept over the balustrade.

A queer shock went through him. She seemed to blend with the setting, eerily. Her face was almost elfin, oval and softly angular. Her lips were half parted in astonishment, and her eyes were deep pools in which the moonlight danced and came out again in amber shades. By her attitude, Fostar guessed that she had been as startled as he. He heard her sharp gasp.

"I'm sorry I frightened you," he murmured. "I didn't know you were here."

"Oh, I wasn't frightened," she said, a little defiantly. Her voice was low, musical. Then, as though an explanation were required, she added, "I was just looking up in the sky, and wondering—" But she broke off the sentence, with an odd little shake of her auburn-haired head.

"Wondering what? What lies up there in the Beyond?" asked Fostar, with quickening interest. "I've often done that," he went on, seeing her glance of surprise. "The edge of space, as we know it, is at our doorstep. We are probably the only intelligent beings who have ever been this close!"

Somehow, it seemed quite natural to Fostar to talk of these things with this girl, though she was a total stranger. Keen interest glowed in her face. Where most others would have been offended at the lack of convention, or completely unin-

trigued by the topic, this girl quickly followed his cue.

"It's so mysterious!" she said softly. "Almost—ominous!" She shuddered slightly, though there was no hint of chill in the warm summer breeze.

The man nodded soberly. "There is a threat in it, too," he agreed. "If Earth passes into the Beyond—"

Her eyes were suddenly on his, wide and startled. She interrupted. "Are you one of those—those fools who believe that?" she cried.

Fostar stood dumfounded at her sudden vehemence. "Fools?" he repeated sharply. "You just said yourself—"

"The Beyond is ominous, but remote," she interposed. "Surely you don't believe Earth is in danger?" She made a contemptuous gesture. "You've been reading Dr. Bronzun's bogey-man story!"

The young man's face burned, beneath its tan. "It happens that I'm Rolan Fostar, assistant to Dr. Bronzun!" he snapped.

"Oh!" She faced him for a moment in confusion. "I'm sorry for what I said," she murmured. Then, with feminine caprice, mocking lights stole into her elfin eyes. "How quaint—for grown men to make up fairy-tales!"

Anger hammered in Fostar's pulses, but before he could release the hot words on his lips, a hand touched his elbow. It was the attendant, back again. "Marten Crodell will see you now, sir," he informed, turning to lead the way below.

Fostar hesitated a moment, glaring at the girl. Then he twisted on his heel, but after three steps he whirled.

"What's your name?" he demanded impulsively.

She peered at him half indignantly for a moment. Then—"Alora. Alora—Templeton," she smiled.

The girl remained in Rolan Fostar's mind while he followed his guide down greenstone steps, across carpeted corridors, and finally in an elevator to the very topmost part of the building's slim tower. He might ordinarily have taken more notice of the sumptuous interior of Interplanetary Real Estate Corporation, which he saw for the first time. Its richness bespoke the wealth and extent of its financial empire in the Solar System. Tapestries of Venusian silk, furniture of Ioan glow-wood, and the odd murmuring plants of Titan in niches lent an otherworldly air to the place.

But the girl slipped from his mind when he was ushered finally into the presence of Marten Crodell, in a small room faintly redolent with the exotic perfume of Rhean horticulture.

Marten Crodell, seated at a glow-wood desk, was a tall, thin man, more ungainly than the tele-news usually pictured him. He was ascetic in appearance — narrow face, pinched cheeks, thin nose and lips, close-cropped hair. He was dressed in unrelieved black. His eyes were strange—dark and shadowed, staring out like two glowing coals from the sallow complexion of his skin. Fostar noticed his hands, thin and nervous, the fingers constantly flexing and un-flexing.

The two men stared at each other for a moment. Fostar felt himself being sized up, weighed, by the man who controlled the largest privately-owned institution on Earth and in the Solar System—a man whose wealth in terms of money was incalculable. Fostar, in turn, flatly thought of Crodell as one who sought power. Those

fingers, clenching and unclenching, were grasping—clutching—

"Dr. Bronzun?"

Marten Crodell's voice, high-pitched and terse, shattered the silence. He frowned. "I had thought you would be an older man—"

Fostar gave his name and added, "Dr. Bronzun sent me in his place."

"I wanted to see him!" snapped Crodell. "Why didn't he come here?"

"Because everyone doesn't have to come running at your least command!" flared back Fostar, still half-angered from the episode with the girl. He strode to the desk and leaned over it. "I only came here myself, Marten Crodell, to tell you that to your face. You may wield a scepter of power over thousands of men, here on Earth and the planets, but not all others. Next time you want to see Dr. Bronzun, come to our laboratory!"

Fostar turned for the door.

"Just a minute, young man!"

The tones, strangely enough, were half apologetic. Fostar hesitated, then turned back. After all, Dr. Bronzun had told him to find out what Marten Crodell wanted. Fostar had let his anger carry him away. He met the eyes of the plutocratic land-owner and saw in them a faint gleam of approbation, perhaps admiration.

"I like your spirit, Fostar." The thin lips smiled slightly. "Sit down, please. I wished to see Dr. Bronzun about something very important. I presume you are qualified to answer for him?"

"I've been with him for five years, as assistant in his laboratory, and pilot of his space-ship, on his researches," asserted Fostar.

"Good enough," nodded Crodell. He turned to a tele-news recorder on a stand beside his desk and flicked the switch. With a quiet hiss, the record-

ing roll rotated within and a clear, electrical reproduction of voice came forth.

"The following is unofficial and unconfirmed," spoke the announcer's smooth voice. "Dr. Jole Bronzun claims he now has fully confirmed his own prediction of a year ago—that Earth and the Solar System will plunge into the 'Edge of Space,' within a half-century. Our velocity toward the 'Beyond'—as he calls it—is about 18,000 miles a second. He has obtained this result, he says, by careful measurements on Mars, Ganymede and Oberon. The Edge of Space, he declares, is no more than five light-years away.

"Secondly, Dr. Bronzun warns that catastrophe will result! Earth and all the planets will be destroyed, when they reach the Edge of Space. In the Beyond, he predicts, there are no cosmic rays. There is complete nothingness. All the normal laws of the universe that we know are null and void. Matter and life cannot exist in such a negative space.

"Dr. Bronzun has not, as yet, offered any alternative to this annihilation, if his prophecies are correct. But he pleads that other scientists hasten to confirm his results and then take up the important matter of what to do to save the human race. We repeat that this report is unofficial and unconfirmed.

"Bulletin from Dardo, Mars. Reconstruction of Canal M-3 progressing—"

MARTEN CRODELL snapped off the instrument and eyed Fostar.

"That news item, taken up by the greedy news-agencies as thrilling fodder for the masses, was broadcast yesterday to millions of people, throughout the System. Your Dr.

Bronzun has sown a seed of fear in many gullible hearts. It is flagrant sensationalism!" The land-owner crashed a thin fist on his desk for emphasis. "It must never happen again!"

"Why?" challenged Fostar calmly. "Did the Interplanetary stock market drop a few points—spoil some of your financial deals?"

The sallow face across the desk darkened. "That has nothing to do with it," Crodell growled. "As a matter of fact, there was a slight drop in the market. Six times in the past year, Dr. Bronzun has made these wild reports, and each time there has been a growing reaction. It can eventually lead to panic among the masses. That is what I'm afraid of!"

"And that is what we want!" said Fostar quietly. "Not panic, actually, but an awareness of the doom that faces us!"

"You actually believe that?" gasped Marten Crodell, as though the thought were utterly novel. "I'd surmised your game was cheap publicity, for some invention, perhaps. But now I see that you are fanatics! You have a phobia, a fixed obsession, that such a doom threatens!"

Rolan Fostar looked grim. "I wish it were just a phobia, but figures don't lie." He stood up again, talking rapidly, earnestly. "Our galaxy, or island universe, lies in a unique position—near the true Edge of Space. As you and everyone are aware, our summer skies show no stars, no nebulae—nothing. We look out upon non-space!"

Crodell waved a hand. "It has been the same for hundreds of thousands of years," he scoffed. "Why be alarmed at this late date?"

"Because we have been approaching the Edge of Space all that time!" pursued Fostar. "Our particular

galaxy is roughly wheel-shaped, as most of them are. It is turned edgewise to the Beyond, and is rotating. And our sun and planet system are right now at the topmost swing of this gigantic wheel! Only five more light-years of distance separate us from the verge of the Beyond—from the Edge of Space!"

"The Edge of Space!" sneered Crodell. "Dr. Bronzun invented the term. It's a figment of his mind."

"You want facts," Fostar continued inexorably. "All right. At our laboratory we have a set of news-records, collected in the past year. Do you recall the inexplicable occurrence during the Olympic Games at Byrdville, Antarctica—where a certain high-jumper leaped twenty-five feet? He wasn't able to duplicate the performance, nor could the other athletes. For just a brief moment, the law of gravity had slipped. Then, in a European village last winter, matches could not be lighted for a stretch of several hours. The laws of friction had temporarily been suspended. There are many other cases.

"All these add up to one thing," he concluded. "The Edge of Space is not a sharp line of demarcation. We are already within the fringes of it, accounting for the isolated examples of suspended natural laws. Space-time is thinning, and when Earth reaches deeper into the Beyond, chaos will result!"

Marten Crodell seemed undisturbed. "Granting all that," he remarked shortly. "There is still no danger. Astronomers have determined that our sun, rather than going outward, is moving inward toward the rest of the universe."

"They have used the wrong system of—" began Fostar.

The land-owner glowered. "All the eminent astronomers of Earth are

wrong—and Dr. Bronzun is right?" he mocked.

Rolan Foster felt helpless dismay steal into him. "No use to go on. It was like a voice crying in the wilderness, against all the inertia and stability of a ponderous civilization.

He glared bitterly at the land magnate.

"Marten Crodell," he pronounced, "the day is coming when your money empire will fall into ashes. Because the only hope for the human race—"

"Theatrics!" exploded Crodell. "I won't hear any more of it." His voice became harsh, his eyes hard. "You and Dr. Bronzun are croaking fanatics, I'm convinced of that. I warn you that I can't tolerate any more scare-mongery. I'll crush you, if I must, and I have the power to do it. For one thing, you will never be able to send a message over the public news-casts again—I've seen to that. Furthermore, if you don't retract your last statement within three days, I'll swear out a warrant for your arrest!"

Foster shrugged, realizing the interview was over. "You must make a bad enemy," he observed. "But you can't fight the truth, Marten Crodell!"

CHAPTER II

"A FOURTH PASSENGER . . ."

WITHOUT another word he jerked open the door and strode down the hall. An attendant came hurrying after him, to guide him politely to the landing roof.

Rolan Foster stood for a moment, beside his aerocar, letting the evening breeze cool his hot forehead. He looked up at lonely Mars and Saturn, in the empty sky, and the moon. No

stars. The Beyond ate up stars, for other suns must have blundered to the Edge of Space. Sol would go on, to its doom. And here the world lay, unaware, stupidly complacent in a false security. He felt like shouting it out over the housetops, but that would do no good. Years from now they would awake to the menace—when it might be too late!

A white form glided forward from the shadows. Foster turned and looked at the elfin face of Alora Templeton, softly illumined by silvery moonlight. He caught his breath at the picture.

"You saw Marten Crodell?" she asked. "What did he say?"

"Everything stupid!" Foster said fiercely, anger welling in him again. Anger at the girl, too. "He wouldn't listen to me either. But we'll show him. We'll take a ship out there, to the Edge of Space, and bring back proof!"

The girl gasped. "You can't go out there!" she protested. "The fastest ship can go only 10,000 miles a second. It would take you 90 years to go out to that Beyond you speak of. How foolish—"

"Foolish, eh?" he almost snarled at her. "We'll see who the fools are!"

She started to speak, but he jumped into his aerocar and slammed the door. Not till he was skimming high over the city did he feel remorse for letting his temper get the best of him, both with Crodell and the girl—particularly the girl. His grim lips loosened a bit as his mind's eye conjured up her face, a saucy face, and yet somehow sweet. If the future did not loom with such portentous things, he would have the right to think of going back to her. But he couldn't. Very likely he would never see her again.

Dr. Jole Bronzun had spent a lifetime studying the cosmos, but a human lifetime is short compared to the majestic motions and schedules of galactic systems. He had not seen the finger of doom pointing till the year before—pointing toward the Beyond!

He had checked and rechecked his observations, hoping he was wrong, but the shift of spectroscopic lines toward the red, in the spectrums of nearby nebulae, left no room for doubt, at least in his mind. Yet so delicate had been his measurements, that he was not sure himself, sometimes.

How easy it was for a man, with his little senses, to misinterpret the great cosmos!

One other great discovery had come to the worshiper of the infinite—that the speed of light could be exceeded, contrary to classical belief since Einstein. With the powerful electro-magnifying telescopes of the time, he had seen solar prominences, of certain of the nearest and hottest stars, shoot outward, disappear and reappear, much further away. During the period of vanishment, the light-speed had been exceeded!

Amazed, he had taken spectroscopic records and finally detected the strange type of supermagnetic field required for the phenomenon. In his laboratory, then, he had brought this weird physical effect down from the stars. He had it now, incorporated into the atomic-motor of a space-ship. Foster, with his mechanical skill, had helped him in the past five years, since he was an old friend of his dead father.

Dr. Bronzun was not young any more. His beard and the thin hair of his head were white. His peerings into the heavens for long hours, hunched over instruments, had made

him stooped. His eyes were calm and gentle, from contemplation of the peaceful depths of space. Underneath his lofty brow were the dreamy features of the thinker.

But his face was deeply worried now, as he listened to Rolan Foster's recital of the meeting with Marten Crodell. His fine, blue-veined hands made weary gestures.

"Marten Crodell thinks we're fanatics," Foster concluded. "But he's the fanatic! All he's concerned with is interplanetary finances. Convinced that we're scare-mongers, he's our bitter enemy. I doubt that we can get the public ear any more—and he'll have us arrested in three days—probably on trumped up charges."

Dr. Bronzun nodded hopelessly. "We're stopped on all sides. My colleagues have discredited me as an astronomer. At their advice, the government has refused to make an official investigation."

His eyes were pained, with the look of a man who realizes that a lifetime of study is unappreciated by his fellow men.

"Stopped on all sides," he repeated, "Except—one!"

They looked at each other and then wordlessly stepped into the large shed next to the laboratory. It housed the scientist's private space-ship, a small craft in which Foster had piloted him to various planets. The engine had been removed and lay now on the repair block. A man labored over it, face and hands smeared with grease.

He looked up. "I don't think we will come back," he said dolefully.

Angus Macluff, the scientist's handyman for twenty years, had never been known to smile. His rugged features and gravel voice were perpetually pessimistic. He had openly called his employer a fool about

many things, but a peculiar sense of devotion tied him to the scientist.

His gnarled hand indicated the huge, intricate helix of shiny beryllium that he had just finished bolting into the framework of the powerful atomic-engine. It was Dr. Bronzun's "trans-space drive."

"It won't work, gentlemen," he demurred. Not for sustained driving over the speed of light. Remember, we blew out a rocket tube on the test flight to Mars. If we go too far, we'll blow up out there, and leave our bones in outer space!"

"Cheerful as ever!" grinned Fostar. "This is a larger and better helix, and there shouldn't be any limit to our cruising range."

"Yes, I'm confident of that," Dr. Bronzun said firmly. His eyes shone with pride, for the new trans-space drive could have revolutionized space commerce. But he was not ready to announce it yet. It must first serve the purpose for which—basically—he had devised it. And that was to prove the doom that lay in the Beyond.

"We must leave in three days," he continued, "before Marten Crodell can carry out his threat of arrest. Embark for the Beyond! Bring back first-hand data of the menace that lies out there! It's our only course now."

"And stick it under their noses," muttered Fostar, thinking of the land-owner—and the girl.

"If we come back!" croaked Angus Maccluff dourly. He turned suddenly. "I thought I heard the door creak," he said, ambling toward it. The shed door was partly ajar, but there was no one there. He did not notice the figure that crouched behind the hedges and later jumped into an aerocar that disappeared toward the heart of the city.

IN THE morning of the third day, as dawn broke redly over the sleeping city nearby, their space-ship roared into the sky, bound for the remotest destination in human history. Within it, three humans gazed back at the receding Earth with somber eyes.

"Let's hope," said Angus Maccluff picturesquely, "that we will feel its summer breezes and winter chills again!"

"We will, of course, you croaking raven," admonished Rolan Fostar, but his words were more cheerful than his tone. He had looked forward to this venture, while they had been developing the new drive, but now he felt the chill of the unknown penetrating his every cell. He looked into the Beyond, through his conning port, and wondered what they would meet out there.

According to their plans, Fostar piloted the ship in the line of Earth's extended North Pole, in order to rise above the plane of the Solar System. This gave them, in a few hours, a clear approach to the Beyond. They wanted no worry of asteroids, comets and planets ahead of them when they switched to the trans-space drive.

Finally the moment came to apply its wonder-working influence. They had decelerated to a stop and were hovering, relative to the sun. Dr. Bronzun switched on the atomic-generator that fed the coils with power. A lambent glow sprang about the huge helix, pulsing with nameless radiation. Watching the dials, the scientist carefully manipulated energies that slowly built up a strange, supermagnetic field. They could feel it, subtly working through their bodies and through the air and space around them.

Suddenly, with the last turn of a rheostat, their vision wavered. The ship seemed to twist impossibly, at

queer angles. The curves of the cabin writhed into incredible distortions. Their bodies seemed to turn inside out. Outside, the universe whirled and danced, and all the stars became aimless fireflies, darting about.

Fostar almost cried out in alarm till he remembered that he had gone through the same experience during the test flight, but in lesser degree. He clutched at his seat's hand-hold and waited for the sensations to quiet down. Angus Macluff's florid face peered from beside the rocket engine, with a stark anticipation of immediate death.

But gradually their swimming senses cleared and things again looked and felt more or less normal. Not quite, however, for there was still a lurking wrongness in the air.

Dr. Bronzun heaved a sigh of relief. "For a moment," he muttered truthfully, "I thought the field might not confine itself and—explode! But the danger's over. We have been slightly—ever so slightly—rotated at an angle to ordinary space-time. Enough so that inertia is greatly reduced."

To demonstrate, he smashed his fist against the metal wall with all the power of his arm. The blow would ordinarily have crushed his knuckles to bleeding pulp. Instead, there was the faintest of sounds at the impact and his fist bounced lightly back! It would have done as little harm to batter his head against the metal!

"That is the ultimate secret of the drive," explained the scientist. "Reducing inertia. Now, each thrust of our rockets will be a thousand times as effective."

Fostar started the rockets and with a smooth purr they drummed out. Strangely, he hardly felt motion, thought he knew the ship was slip-

ping through space like a flaming arrow. His own reduced inertia eliminated acceleration effects.

Under the trans-space drive, velocity mounted prodigiously—

Fostar looked out upon the Solar System. Though he had known it all his life, it was always startling to see the divided firmament—half crammed with stars, half achingly empty. Sol and its planets lay at the crest of the stars, nearer to the barren region than any other sun.

And it was drifting out to—absolute nothingness!

This was the reason for their daring argosy out to the Beyond, to forewarn of that peril. But would they come back? And would their tale be believed? Fostar shook his head and set his jaw grimly. No use to conjecture in advance.

An hour later, they reached the speed of light.

Though expecting it, it came as a shock when all the universe behind them blinked out. They were now going faster than light rays from the stars, and consequently could not see them. The sun winked out, and all the planets.

They seemed lost in infinity!

Angus Macluff suddenly gave a sharp, half-disgusted gasp. "Look!" he exclaimed, pointing ahead. "The ship switched around, somehow. We're going toward the stars—not the Beyond!"

Seemingly, it was so. The heavens before the nose of the ship had suddenly blazed out with stars. Stars that shouldn't be there. It was quite reversed. The chilling Beyond now flamed with pinpoints, as the universe behind had vanished.

"No, Angus," Dr. Bronzun explained. "We are now overtaking light-rays that were ahead of the ship. The image of the universe

ahead is just a mirage—a past reflection of the true, but invisible universe behind us!”

Fostar increased acceleration. An hour later, Pluto resolved into a small disk. Ordinary rocket ships took better than four months to reach this outermost planet! As they passed its orbit, Pluto vanished, its lagging light rays no longer able to catch the flying craft.

NOW before them stretched a vacancy almost inconceivable. To penetrate even one-fifth of the distance toward the Beyond would require months at their present velocity of five light-speeds, and they had supplies only for one month, all they were able to carry in the small craft.

Fostar stepped up the acceleration cautiously. Dr. Bronzun kept an eagle eye on his trans-space drive, and Angus Maccluff bestowed almost loving care on the droning engine. The latter, always mumbling to himself in dire phrases, once looked over his shoulder fearfully.

“A fourth passenger rides with us!” he said dourly. “Death! Mark my words, gentlemen, we’ll never—”

“Quiet, Angus!” snapped Fostar, though ordinarily he disregarded or laughed at the engineer’s dismal comments. “We need a high morale for this trip. This is not like hopping from one planet to the next.”

The engineer subsided to inarticulate grumblings.

But Fostar felt, too, that the fourth passenger rode with them, waiting—waiting for the least little slip of the engine, or the trans-space drive. Or, by comic mischance, a lone meteor might intersect their course. At their stupendous velocity, the collision, even with a pebble, would mean instantaneous disruption.

Their nerves grew more and more

tense as the hours passed and their velocity mounted to staggering heights. Their veloci-meter, specially designed, measured the sweep of space atoms past their hull.

This speed, ten hours later, reached the colossal figure of 100 times the speed of light—almost 20 million miles a second! The trip from Earth to Mars, at that same rate, would occupy just two seconds! Even to negotiate the great four billion mile lap to Pluto, only three minutes!

Fostar, whose hand at the master controls had brought about this astronomical speed, felt dazed. He had the feeling of a god, for a moment, a transcendental being whose fingers touched ultimate energies. He shook his head, then. After all, it was not due to him, but to the genius of Dr. Bronzun.

The white-haired old scientist’s face was stamped with a quiet triumph. He had the right to feel like a god. His soaring mind had burst the prison of outer space. He had, in a sense, taken the universe in his two hands and squeezed it down to Man’s proportions.

Eventually, through this, mankind would inherit the stars!

Dr. Bronzun stirred now. After one more vigilant glance at the instruments of his trans-space drive, he turned his head to Fostar.

“That’s enough velocity now,” he said. “At this rate, we’ll cross a light-year of space in about 3½ days. We’ll be able to reach close to the Beyond within the limit of our supplies.” His eyes shone and his thin hands caressed a boxed transformer. “The trans-space drive has worked beautifully—beautifully!”

As Fostar locked the controls at zero, and the vague sensation of their hardly-felt inertialess acceleration stopped altogether, their tense nerves

eased. For the first time in those long hours, Foster brought a smile to his lips. Even Angus MacLuff was faintly cheerful.

"It's a miracle we're yet alive," he vouched grudgingly. Then, as though he had betrayed himself, he added. "But miracles only happen once, gentlemen!"

"Damn your cheerless tongue!" said Foster lightly. He snapped his fingers. "I have a hollow feeling and I think it's hunger," he continued jovially. "Angus, see what you can find in the pantry, like a good fellow."

"I think we deserve a meal," smiled Dr. Bronzun.

"May it not be our last!" observed the engineer as he shuffled to the tiny food-storage room. He went in and they could hear him rummaging around. He emerged a moment later, his face queerly shocked.

"We have a fourth passenger," he said slowly.

"Angus, you're repeating yourself," grinned Foster. "That's not usual of you. Now—"

"Come and see!" interposed the engineer. "We have a stowaway!"

CHAPTER III

INTO THE BEYOND

GLANCING at each other, Dr. Bronzun and Foster ran to the pantry door. Looking in, Foster could not hold back a startled cry.

She sat on a sealed case of food, in the packed supply room, calmly munching on a vitaminized biscuit that she had taken from its cellophane wrapper.

"Alora!" gasped Foster. "Alora Templeton! Good Lord—" He stopped, half-choking in surprise.

"Oh, hello there!" she returned

gaily. "Hungry? Have a bite with me. There's plenty here!"

Foster recovered himself with an effort. "How did you get aboard?" he demanded.

"Simply enough," she explained. "I sneaked in the shed the night before you left, found this spot in the ship, and here I am. I knew when you were leaving because I overheard your plans the day you came back from Marten Crodell's place."

"It was you at the door, then," observed Angus MacLuff. "Eavesdropping!"

The girl nodded, unabashed. Her manner was airy, self-possessed.

"But why?" queried Foster, still staring at her as though he couldn't believe his eyes. "Why did you come along?"

"I'm naturally impulsive, I suppose," she smiled. Then she became serious, setting her biscuit aside. "To persuade you not to make the flight!" she revealed, in sober tones. "I meant to convince you that you were foolish to risk your lives in a mad attempt to prove your queer theories. I thought with myself aboard, you would turn back. But I fell asleep here. The next thing I knew, the ship was taking off. I must have bumped my head then—I went unconscious. I came to later, but then something queer happened. Everything seemed to twist and—and become wrong!"

Foster nodded slightly. That must have been when they changed to the trans-space drive.

"I guess I simply fainted then," the girl continued. "I wasn't feeling any too strong after that bump on my head. I came to again just a few minutes ago and thought a little food would help me. Just then your man here came in. That's all the story!"

Foster was still glaring at her.

"Of all the insane tricks—to stow-away on this ship!" he exploded. "Turn back? It's too late to turn back now. Do you know where we are? We're 300 billion miles from the sun, and our present velocity is one hundred times the speed of light—toward the Beyond!" He made a grimace and added, "If you can understand that!"

Alora's elfin face had paled. But instantly she flared. "I can understand it!" she blazed. "I'm not a child. But"—her voice faltered—"but I had no idea, when you spoke of a new drive, that you could really—" She broke off, as the stunning realization fully struck her. "300 billion miles!" she breathed, her hand at her throat.

"It's a mite further than you'd expect," said Angus MacLuff half-pityingly. Clumsily, he patted her shoulder. "But don't you fear. We're not dead—yet!" It was the nearest he could come to being comforting.

"A woman—along on this trip!" muttered Foster. "She—"

"Don't say that, lad!" Angus interposed quickly. He lowered his voice. "Don't you know it's bad luck to have a woman along on any new flight? We must talk of her as though she were a man!"

Dr. Bronzun shook his head, though not because of the engineer's superstition. "I think perhaps we should turn back. We can't risk her life—"

"No!" said Foster grimly. "It's her own fault for being aboard. We didn't invite her, or kidnap her. Besides, this is too important for her presence to make any difference." He faced her. "We're going out to the Beyond, to prove that in it lies doom—Earth's doom. Marten Crodell doesn't believe, nor the rest of Earth. We'll prove it to them!"

ALORA was staring at him, skeptically. "You're wrong, of course," she stated evenly. "You're fanatics. Marten Crodell is right. He had the best astronomers check, after Dr. Bronzun's first announcement. Earth is in no danger. But you are, even if this journey succeeds. Marten Crodell will crush you with his power, when you get back!"

Her voice had almost become impassioned. "You must use your reason. You must! Marten Crodell—"

"Marten Crodell be damned!" barked Foster. "I'm not afraid of him. He's the most hard-headed, blundering, grasping, thieving—"

"Stop!" The girl had come to her feet, face furious. "Don't call him names like that! I won't stand for it. I—"

"Why not?" grunted Foster, surprised at her vehemence.

"Because I'm his—daughter!"

"Daughter!" gasped Foster. "Marten Crodell's daughter? But your name—"

"It Alora Templeton Crodell! I didn't tell you that night, because I knew you were angry with my father."

Rolan Foster had a more bewildered feeling than when the trans-space drive had brought the queer wrongness. This was wrong, too—that this attractive, intelligent young woman should be the daughter of Earth's most autocratic moneylord. No, it was right! Too bitterly right. Things dovetailed immediately. Her own spoiled attitude—her contempt of their theory—her outspoken criticism. They were all of the Marten Crodell flavor.

He moved away from her so obviously that she flushed. "I might have known it!" he said, with cold rage. "You're just as stubborn, narrow-minded—"

"Stow it, lad," interjected Angus MacLuff. "You might at least use a civil tongue to the little la—person. Look—the poor child is ill—"

The girl's flush had changed to a ghastly paleness. She swayed on her feet and the engineer leaped forward to catch her. But Foster was there ahead of him. He picked her up in his arms and carried her to a bunk. His emotions altered inexplicably as he looked down at her closed eyes and drawn features. He couldn't feel angry with her any more.

"Take care of her, Angus," he muttered. He turned away, knowing that the gnarled old engineer would doctor her up skilfully with the supplies of the medicine chest.

Angus announced, a while later, that the girl—the "new gentleman" he called her—had passed into a quiet sleep. Also tired from the long, tense drive of the past day, the three men retired. His bunk usurped by the girl, Angus rolled himself in a blanket on the floor. There was no need of a guard awake. The air and heating equipment, long a standard item of space-ships, was automatic.

The next "morning"—by the chronometer—Rolan Foster peered out of the side port. Nothing had changed. Back of them was still an almost impossible blackness, where the hidden universe and its laggard light impulses lay. It hurt the eyes to look into that rayless cauldron.

Ahead lay the shimmering mirage-universe, no nearer, no farther—unchanged. Because of their super-velocity, they were in reality seeing an older and older picture, like the unwinding of a reel backward, but it meant nothing. The stars, to human eyes, had held their configuration for untold centuries.

Foster was aware when Alora Crodell arose. He heard Angus MacLuff

inquire solicitously after her health, and her reply that though a little weak, she was all right. He felt her gaze on the back of his head and turned to meet her amber eyes. He met obvious coolness, though not hostility.

Foster turned his eyes away quickly. Then, ashamed of himself, he whirled again.

"Look here," he said gruffly, "we're going to be aboard this ship together for some time. Let's at least be half-way civil to each other."

"That's the right spirit, lad!" approved Angus MacLuff. He added dolefully, "With our hours numbered, we should have no quarrels among us."

Foster saw the instant reaction in the girl. She smiled disarmingly, and came forward.

"I'm glad you said that!" she murmured. Then she gasped as her wide eyes took in the panorama of space. It was breath-taking, at first glance.

Foster had to explain the mirage-universe to her. "You're one of the first four humans to go faster than light," he reminded her.

"I'm glad I'm along," she said abruptly, taking a deep breath. "This is such a strange journey, so thrilling and adventurous!"

Her face was aglow. Lit by the soft radiance of the reflected universe, her elfin features captivated Foster's interest. She was lovely; that was the plain fact.

And then, suddenly, she was hideous.

Her fair complexion changed to a ghastly green. Auburn hair became a violent purple. Her teeth, from between her slightly parted lips, shone with a stained crimson. Her amber eyes gleamed stark white!

Alarmed, Foster saw that the girl was looking at him with horror! He

flashed his eyes around and saw a mad scene of riotous colors, as though gallons of lurid paint had been dumped in the ship. The silvery walls were funereal blue, instruments mottled in purple, yellow and scarlet hues. Angus MacLuff's florid face was a venomous emerald, his heavy eyebrows dripping with bright orange!

Dr. Bronzun's excited voice clipped out, as he scurried for his instrument bench:

"A shift in the spectrum!" he informed. "Another manifestation of natural laws suspended. Nothing dangerous. It simply means that all the light around us has changed its wave-length a good many microns. I must measure the amount—"

Alora laughed weakly, in the following relief. "You look like a monster from some other universe!" she said impishly to Foster. Then she looked in her hand-mirror and shrieked. The eternal feminine came to the fore and she tried to soften the ravages of the misplaced spectrum with cosmetics. The result, if anything, was more frightful, as she applied purple powder and indigo lipstick.

The phenomenon passed in five minutes, and all was normal again.

"Spacetime is thinning gradually, as we approach the Edge of Space," murmured Dr. Bronzun. "The cosmic-rays have fallen off ten percent."

"How far out are you going?" asked Alora, in a subdued voice.

"As far as we need to, for undeniable proof," answered Foster. "Perhaps to the very Edge of Space!"

The girl shuddered. "You make it sound real, the way you say it so sepulchral!" She laughed shortly. "But you'll excuse me if I just keep on believing that my father's right—

that you're fanatics—and on a fool's errand!"

Foster conquered a stab of anger. "You'll see!" he promised grimly.

"You'll see!" challenged the girl.

"None of us will see!" came Angus MacLuff's pessimistic grumble. "Unless fate is very, very kind!"

CHAPTER IV

INFINITY'S BOUNDARY

ON AND on the wayward ship ship hurtled, carrying its four passengers toward the rim of things. Behind them—nothing. Before them—a ghostly, mocking universe.

A chill descended over their spirits. Even Alora Crodell, with her skeptical attitude, grew subdued and kept her opinions to herself. Angus MacLuff's dolorous mutterings ran the gamut of pessimism. Dr. Bronzun's calm eyes had a certain bleak tenseness in them.

A succession of strange phenomena occurred.

Once, at mealtime, they were unable to sweeten their coffee, though they heaped in sugar. They tried the sugar separately, to find it absolutely tasteless. Dr. Bronzun made a tentative test with his chemical kit and announced that it had changed to a polysaccharide. A few minutes later it was normal sugar again. They had passed through an area of thinned space-time in which disaccharide carbon-chains could not exist!

At another time, Foster, talking to Angus, found the engineer looking at him blankly, as though he heard nothing. Then Foster suddenly realized he couldn't hear his own voice!—nor any other sound. There was an utter, grave-like silence—a com-

plete, eerie absence of sound—in the ship's interior, for several nerve-wracking minutes. Then sound came back again, like an avalanche of thunder, but it was welcome.

Dr. Bronzun conjectured that the laws of sound propagation had temporarily become dispelled. Perhaps, as with the shift of spectrum, there had been a shift of sound vibration, but so much that it passed the range of their ears.

Angus Macluff unwittingly demonstrated the power of thought, on another occasion. Peering at the cabin's thermometer, he let out a shout and began mopping his forehead. The temperature read 96 degrees Centigrade!—almost the boiling point of water, and far above the temperature any man could stand for more than a few seconds. Dr. Bronzun calmed their momentary panic by simply pointing out that it wasn't that hot. The temperature had not changed a degree. The thermometer had undergone an individual phenomenon.

Angus Macluff, at this, stuffed his handkerchief away sheepishly. The sweat on his forehead had been very real, however.

The staid laws of geometry underwent a baffling metamorphosis for one period. They suddenly found their eyes playing them tricks. Small objects looked large, large ones small; curves were straight, and edges were looped. A hand moved nearer to the eyes shrank; moved away, it loomed large. It was similar to the hazy effects of rotating space-time, with the trans-space drive, but much more clear-cut and nightmarishly real. Fostar barely choked off a yelp of dismay as Alora's bodyless head, multiplied a hundred times, seemed to roll at his feet. Most baffling of all, closing their eyes did no good. The distorted visions

went on unabated, till the phenomenon had run its course.

"We were rotated at another angle to space-time for a moment," remarked the scientist. "Thank heaven we didn't stay in it!"

But they were considerably more startled the day certain objects in the ship could not be picked up. Fostar reached for the drinking cup under the water-carboy, but his fingers met, empty. He reached again, and clearly saw his fingers pass through the material of the metal cup, as though it were an unreal image. He felt only a slight tingling, but nothing tangible.

Angus Macluff came from the pantry, his face wild, to stammer that he had tried ten times to pick up a coffee can, without being able to so much as feel it! Dr. Bronzun excitedly examined the objects, passing through them a variety of solid materials. All went through unchanged, untouched. Suddenly, some slight disturbance occurred that caused the objects affected to float up into the air and drift toward the hull. Vainly, they tried to catch them and knock them down, but it was no better than trying to grasp smoke, or a moonbeam.

All of the objects but one drifted through the hull and were never seen again. The last object, one of Dr. Bronzun's spectroscopic gratings, stopped just before it touched the hull, and gently slid toward the ship's center of mass. The phenomenon had passed. The grating was solid again, and the scientist caught it, rather gratefully.

"Another law of nature violated!" he observed. "That two objects cannot occupy the same unit space-time!"

Angus Macluff's face reflected a resignation that had grown with the

passing days, and added phenomena.

"I like not these experiences," he sighed. "Mark my words, gentlemen"—he stared hard at Alora, as he always did using that term—"one of them will be our finish!"

Dr. Bronzun waved a hand, dismissing the engineer's customary foreboding.

But Foster was thoughtful. He had felt for some days that their risks were mounting geometrically with every added linear mile toward the Edge of Space.

"Perhaps we should be cautious," he said to the scientist. "The phenomena are becoming more numerous, more prolonged, and more threatening. Space-time must be thinning rapidly. So far we've met only isolated patches of thinness, like those that have even reached Earth. But if we should happen to run into a wide belt or area—"

He broke off the sentence. "Besides—" He hesitated, then went on without looking at Alora. "We have an added passenger. Our oxygen consumption has been increased, by that amount. We have to take that into account."

Foster had tried to keep from showing it, but he knew that a faint trace of bitterness had crept into his voice. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the girl's head toss.

Dr. Bronzun nodded, without hesitation. "Begin deceleration," he ordered. "We're eleven days out, and almost three light-years from the sun. That is far enough, perhaps. The final Edge of Space can't be more than two light-years further. I think all the proofs I will need can be gathered here, however."

FOSTAR sat before his controls, rather relieved that they were to begin deceleration. Dr. Bronzun

started up his atomic-generator, and again the eery, lambent glow spread a colorful halo about the great coils of his trans-space drive.

Foster expertly turned the ship 180 degrees with offside blasts. Then, with the rocket jets firing into their line of flight, he brought the engine to its usual operating rate.

Deceleration had begun, slowing their colossal speed of 100 times the velocity of light. In twelve hours, they would be stationary, relative to the sun they had left behind.

Foster heaved a sigh of relief. The trans-space drive, not tested as fully as they might have wanted for this hazardous trip, was proving itself equal to its task. He looked out of the conning port. Now, quite naturally, the region of the firmament before the ship's nose was rayless, blank. The mirage-universe had taken up its position at the rear.

Then another image appeared, reflected from the glass. It was Alora Crodell's face. She was beside him, looking at him reproachfully, half angrily.

"You made it rather pointed, a moment ago, that I was an unwanted passenger!" she said in injured tones.

He grunted noncommittally.

"We got along so well all this time," she continued, her tone becoming softer, "that I thought we might become—friends!"

"I understood it to be a truce," Foster returned shortly. "You still think this is a fool's errand?"

"Of course!" Alora returned sweetly. "But I'm still glad I'm along—for the thrill!"

Foster glanced at her. "That's all it means to you?" he asked incredulously. "Haven't any of those phenomena convinced you that something lies out here beyond human experience?"

"I'm only convinced," returned the girl evenly, "that you've exceeded the speed of light. The other effects may be due to that."

"You're as hard-headed as your father," commented Foster, bluntly. His face was set as he went on. "All these have been the signposts of the future fate of Earth. We will return with news of—doom!"

The girl shivered involuntarily. "No you can't be right," she whispered. "You can't be! My father must be right—that you are fanatics, cranks. When I saw my father that day, after you had left, he said you were just being young and brave and foolish—about going out to the Beyond and proving it. That's why I tried to stop you. I didn't want it on my father's head that he had driven you to it."

"There are many things on Marten Crodell's head—" Foster said stonily.

"You're wrong!" the girl blazed instantly. "You misunderstand him, as so many do. He's trying to do good, with the power in his hands. He has a vision of the day when all his land holdings on other planets will be useful and productive—"

"For his profit!" Foster put in succinctly.

The girl choked. "You — you beast!" she spat out.

Foster's temper instantly flared, in keeping with her own. "And you," he countered, "are a wilful, stubborn—"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" came Angus MacIuff's chiding tones. "Words like that would not be pleasant on your lips—if at that moment they became the last you ever spoke!"

Foster looked at Alora, aware of the significance of those words. Certainly, with what ominous things lay outside the ship, their human differ-

ences dwindled to the utterly trivial. But at the same time, the spark of anger hadn't quite cooled within him. He waited for her to speak, and when she didn't—waiting for him—he turned away. But he hated himself for his own stubbornness. They didn't speak to each other again for many hours.

TWELVE hours later, the constant deceleration under the miracle-working of the trans-space drive had reduced their velocity to the point of one light-speed.

As suddenly as was to be expected, the invisible universe they had left behind leaped into view. All the sixth magnitude and larger nebulae and stars flamed into the backdrop of space, to their eyes. In Dr. Bronzun's electro-magnifier, all the other billions of spacial bodies peppered the interstices. He had looked for them, almost as though fearing they might not be there.

Somehow, the sight of the normal universe, hidden from their eyes for twelve days, struck cheer in their hearts—though in the next instant, seeing the sun only as a brilliant first-magnitude star, they felt the depressing realization of the three tremendous light-years that lay between.

Men had never before seen their primary from such a remote vantage.

Yet the greater chill came to them as they turned to view the Beyond. The mirage-universe had vanished, and now the true Edge of Space loomed before them—ultra-black, starless, rayless, horribly empty. There could be nothing comprehensible to human senses beyond it—neither matter, nor light, nor gravity, nor cosmic-rays, nor space-time.

"What lies on the other side of the Edge of Space," mused Dr. Bron-

zun, "would to us be the absolute zero of nothingness!"

"And that's what Earth will become when it crosses that Edge!" muttered Foster grimly. He kept his eye on the instruments. When their velocity had become zero, they would begin gathering the proof for which they had made this unprecedented trip toward nothingness.

He felt a little queer as he looked at the velocimeter—not because of its reading, which was quite correct, but due to the instrument itself. It looked, somehow, a little larger than it should. He rubbed his eyes, shook his head, and looked away. Hallucination, of course. He was tired from the long stretch of vigilance during deceleration.

But he sneaked another look at the velocimeter. It looked even larger now! Furthermore, the other instruments appeared oversize also! Startled, he looked around—

"Rolan, what's wrong?" It was Alora's voice, from back of him. "Why does everything look—larger!"

Foster darted his eyes about. Everything had become larger, and was becoming larger with each passing moment. The nearest port began to loom like a round window. The opposite walls had receded and lengthened. His instruments and pilot-board were now of proportions that might have suited a giant.

And his clothes! They had suddenly become misfits, baggy and sagging into heavy folds.

"We're shrinking!" Angus Mac-luff's hoarse voice boomed out. "This is our end, gentlemen!" His solemn tones held almost satisfaction at an end he had prophesied so many times. At any other time, Foster would have laughed at the ridiculous figure he cut, with his clothing hanging about him like voluminous drapes.

"No, we're not shrinking!" Dr. Bronzun contradicted, pointing out of the port. "The view is wider. The ship, and everything in it except our bodies, is expanding!"

"Just a matter of view," mumbled the engineer. "In either case, we're done for!"

"The ship is subliming—passing from a solid to a gaseous state!" conjectured Dr. Bronzun rapidly. "Again a natural law broken, for there is no heat. Eventually, the walls will dissolve from around us! We must have passed into an area where space-time is very thin—"

"And something tells me this area is large!" burst out Foster. "We've got to stop going deeper into it, and get back to normal space-time. Angus—get at your engine. Dr. Bronzun—the trans-space drive. I'm going to use full deceleration. And pray!"

"No use!" croaked the engineer. "Not even a miracle can save us now!" Nevertheless, he sprang to his engine with grim alacrity, and began pumping the emergency fuel-feed with a frenzied energy that few men, far more optimistic, could have equalled.

Foster stood up on his pilot seat, to better reach controls that had moved back, and grasped the power-lever. With a soundless prayer on his lips, he drew it toward him, notch by notch. The rocket blastings became a muted thunder through the walls of the ship. The hull began to creak and groan as strain built up. He pulled the handle to its last notch and held his breath.

It was seldom that a rocket engine was used at its topmost rate. Vibrational effects were dangerous. But Foster had an added worry—the trans-space drive. If that should

weaken now, under the added stresses, they would never emerge from the space-time thinned area into which they had plunged at almost light-speed.

Seconds passed — seconds that loomed as large as the chronometer that ticked them off. The expanding effect had gone on steadily. Foster felt like a dwarf within the castle of a giant. There was some difficulty in breathing, too, as though the air molecules, growing, were passing into their lungs with difficulty.

It was weird, incredible—but it was happening.

Watching the velocimeter needle dip as the roaring engine hammered down their speed, Foster suddenly found Alora Crodell at his side. Her hand touched his. He looked into her eyes. They were amber, and soft.

He knew what she was thinking—that in the face of death, they had been foolish to quarrel. Something sprang into his mind. It was all so starkly simple—why this elfin girl could make him so angry with her and then so angry with himself.

He grasped her hand. He must tell her quickly, in the fleeting moments left. "Alora, from the first moment—" he began.

"I know," she said tenderly, eagerly. "And now you know why I really stowed away—"

That was all they needed to say. To Rolan Foster, the dread of their present peril—even the greater oppression of Earth's doom—seemed to slide away. The whole universe dissolved into those clear amber eyes, with their shining light. He felt her lips touch his, clingingly.

Angus Macluff's grimy lips formed words unheard above the roar of his engine: "Ah, gentlemen, what a sweet way to pass into eternity!"

Foster's senses darkened. He felt his lungs stifling. He heard Alora's agonized gasping. He could picture their final fate—falling through the ship's walls as these change into drifting molecular smoke. Out into the cold of space. . . .

Doomed!

His mind dipped into oblivion. . . .

CHAPTER V

"HAPPY OTHER EARTH"

FOSTAR awoke to the miracle of being saved. Slumped over the pilot board, he brought up his aching head with a groan and looked around. Alora lay sprawled on the floor, eyes closed, pale as death. Dr. Bronzun, in a similar condition, was slumped beside his trans-space drive.

But Angus Macluff, fume streaked, still stood before his engine, pumping wearily with his great hands as though he had been doing it for all eternity. Foster glanced at the velocimeter. The needle was climbing!

They had come to a stop and were already flying back, out of the danger zone. Saved! The weird expansion of the ship around them had also passed its peak and was rapidly reducing again.

"Angus! We came out of it after all!" Foster yelled joyfully. "You did it, Angus—pumping away at that engine!" He laughed crazily. "And you were so sure we were doomed!"

The engineer stopped suddenly, slid to the floor and sat there looking up, scratching his grizzled thatch of hair. He seemed almost offended.

"Well, mark my words, lad, this is just a temporary reprieve. Our luck can't hold out forever!"

Fifteen minutes later, the other two had been revived and Foster cut

down the engine to cruising range. The ship had scuttled back, well out of range of the area that had held such fatal threat. Things were back to normal size. At Dr. Bronzun's suggestion, Foster maneuvered the ship to a virtual halt, relative to space-time.

"The infinite has seen fit to save us," was the scientist's only comment. "We are undoubtedly as close to the Edge of Space as we can get without disaster. Now"—his voice rang a little—"we'll make the records for doubting Earth!"

Busy hours followed. With all helping, Dr. Bronzun set up his various instruments.

Alora Crodell gave her services as willingly as the others. Her air of skepticism, though still with her, had worn thin. She ventured no open opinion. Her eyes watched the operations with a dark wonder.

And a greater eye seemed to watch them, from outside—the brooding, menacing eye of the Beyond! It held mockery, contempt, for the futile little busybodies in the spaceship who hoped, in knowing the worst, to warn their fellow-beings. And if they succeeded, what then? How could the unsentient Beyond be cheated of its prey?

Angus MacLuff's ready morbidity found new inspiration. "The wheels of eternity," he said sweepingly, "grind everything to extinction!"

THREE days later, the white-haired scientist addressed them all. His eyes glowed with triumph. But in their depths they were bleak. It was a bitter victory.

"My theory is proven!" he announced. "The cosmic-rays have fallen off to half their normal concentration. Secondly, the interferometer shows that two light-years out, at the

true Edge of Space, the temperature is at the final Absolute Zero. In normal space-time, filled with the free energy of entropy, the temperature is three degrees above Absolute Zero."

He counted off the third finger of one hand. "The photon-record shows that light here is being reflected back toward the universe, from the Edge of Space. Finally, the spectroscope shows unequivocally that the velocity of our sun, and its planets, is 18,000 miles a second—toward this ultimate rim of space-time!"

His voice became solemn.

"In less than a half century—annihilation! And before that, perhaps within a decade, the beginnings of chaos on Earth's surface, as it passes deeper and deeper into thinning space-time!"

Rolan Foster and Angus MacLuff glanced at each other quietly. To them, it was simply corroboration for something they had believed in before.

But Alora Crodell's sharp gasp was a sign of the shock she felt. Three days she had doubted, stubbornly and hopefully. Now the bare statement of fact was an overwhelming blow.

"Are you sure?" she demanded, in not much above a whisper. "Absolutely sure?" Then she answered herself. "But of course, you must be. You have four definite proofs." Her amber eyes were wide as she added brokenly, "My father is wrong! We have all been wrong—all the world; ignoring the truth before our eyes, because we didn't want to believe it. Doom!"

Suddenly she underwent a change. Fury sparkled from her eyes. "But now that we know, what good is it?" she raged at the scientist. "If we go back to tell Earth, it will only make the end more miserable. We

can't escape our fate, just by knowing it! We—oh!"

She crumpled into Foster's arms, weeping hysterically. He comforted her, and when she had taken command of herself again, he spoke softly.

"We're going to find a new home for the human race, somewhere! Other stars must have planets. We can migrate to one of them. The trans-space drive will make that possible. Earth can't be saved, but the race might. And that's all that counts!"

Dr. Bronzun, already back to his instruments, nodded. "Mass migration to another sun with planets is the only answer. My last set of measurements deal with certain of the stars and star groups within our own galaxy. We'll gradually file away a series of spectrographic records of their relative motions toward the Edge of Space. Any not threatened by the same doom as Sol will be worth investigation, for planets."

"When we get back to Earth," said Foster incisively, "we must convince them of the truth and start making plans for exploration and migration!"

Alora was staring at him, eyes shining with hope. "We'll convince father! He'll tell it to all the world!"

"Marten Crodell?" Foster's lips unconsciously pursed. "I doubt that he'll be any too easy to convince—particularly because of his great land-holdings on the planets. All that would be wiped away, in the coming emergency. It's justice though—"

"Is it!" blazed the girl instantly. "You still think my father is a grasping, selfish soul—oh, I hate you, Rolan Foster!"

She tore herself out of his arms.

The trigger of Foster's temper clicked simultaneously, as it always seemed to do with this inexplicable girl. "Yes, Marten Crodell is all I've said he is!" he snapped.

And the quarrel was on, with Dr. Bronzun and Angus MacLuff staring at each other helplessly. But a moment later the engineer's gruff voice rose above theirs. "I thought I would have the pleasure of being your best man, at a wedding back on Earth, lad. But I'm doubtful now. She doesn't love you, lad!"

"What?" It was a startled gasp from the girl.

"And you don't love her!" pursued the engineer.

"What!" This time from Foster. A moment later the two were in each other's arms, glaring at Angus MacLuff.

He turned away with a pious eyed. "Well, perhaps I was wrong! However"—his tones went down a pitch—"I doubt we will ever see Earth again, anyway. We are living on borrowed time!"

But the gnarled engineer's doleful prediction seemed again one to pass along with all his unfulfilled others. The trip back held no apparent hazard and the miraculous trans-space drive hurtled them back toward the universe, day by day.

There was a succession of queer phenomena, similar to those of the outward trip as they plowed through areas of ragged space-time. But nothing serious, it seemed. . . .

Not even the one during which, for five minutes, an eerie fire burned inside the ship. It had been heart-stopping, when it struck. Everything had suddenly begun to flame—the metal walls, the instruments, the food they were eating at the time, and even their skins. They ran frantically for the water supply, to

put it out, till Dr. Bronzun quietly announced it wasn't an actual fire.

They noticed then that they felt no heat, no burning or pain. It was like a St. Elmo's Fire, electrical in nature, quite harmless. Little fluorescent flames danced about, and before it was over, they were enjoying it as a magnificent spectacle.

The scientist's conjecture was that a temporary abeyance in the laws of electricity allowed all surface electrons to indulge in their electromagnetic dance without energy. Electrical pressure—voltage—was infinitesimal, and the quantity—amperage—was only enough to give them a slight tingling sensation.

The phenomenon passed, as all the others had, and their unwavering course led them closer and closer to Earth.

ROLAN FOSTAR and Alora Crodell, adhering to a mutual promise not to quarrel, found time to extract some of the sweetness of growing intimacy.

But across their new-found happiness lay a shadow—the shadow of the Beyond—of doom. They were in themselves the final symbol of what the doom meant to the human race. In saving mankind, they would be saving only themselves—and their future.

Alora sighed, a little bitterly, during one of their serious moods, as they stood arm in arm, looking out at the universe of stars. "Why was fate so cruel to us, and all others of our time?" she complained, "to place this terrible problem before us? Why couldn't we have been born at some earlier time?"

"Or—on some other Earth!" murmured Fostar, nodding.

"You mean some other world

away from the Edge of Space?" the girl asked, puzzled by his meaning.

"No, I mean some other Earth, itself!" Fostar went on, half dreamily. "Have you ever heard the late Wilzen's amazing theory? It's an extension of Flammarion's idea, that in all eternity, any combination of atoms and events that once existed can, and must have existed before—many times!"

The girl drew in her breath, at the tremendous scope of the idea.

"It's a metaphysical concept, but quite logical," continued Fostar. "Eternity is a long time! By the law of chance alone, repetition must happen, even down to the last detail. Our universe, you know, is like a machine running down. Eventually all matter will be radiation, and the universe dies its heat-death. That's entropy, and though it takes trillions of years, it's inevitable. Then, another universe forms, from the scattered energy. Nebulae are born—stars and galaxies. Planets cool. That universe dies. On and on it goes—forever!"

The girl clutched at him, reeling mentally.

He went on. "Then, after trillions of universes, repetition occurs because it has to. Therefore, there has been another Earth and sun and planets, just as we know them! Down to the last atom and event! But this other Earth and sun may well have existed in a galaxy away from the Edge of Space. The people of that other world wouldn't know of this doom we face. Our histories, even, may have been essentially alike! In eternity, anything can repeat. But of course, from about this point on, history must diverge, in our Earth and any other similar Earth in time."

Alora had caught up with him. "You mean then, that there may even have been such a world with all our past wars and movements and events?—neolithic life, the Roman Empire, the Dark Ages, the Science Age, Interplanetary Travel? And individuals—Caesar, Columbus, Napoleon, Einstein—"

She broke off, gasping—"Even a you and me?"

"Why not?" mused Foster, whimsically smiling. "Haven't I met you before, somewhere in the land of eternity?"

"Your face is familiar!" laughed Alora.

"Seriously, though," Foster went on, "part of the Wilzen-Flammarion theory is that the queer sensation we have at times, of having been some place, or done something before, may be an ephemeral sort of pre-memory of another life, in another universe! But, somewhere, the destinies of that other Earth and this universe of ours fork sharply. For they didn't have this doom facing them that we have!"

"Happy other Earth!" sighed Alora.

Foster looked at her, smiling strangely. "No, I take it all back. The theory is exploded, at one stroke. Because, dear one, nature could not, even in an eternity of eternities, have made two beings as wonderful as you!"

"Oh, Rolan—"

Angus MacLuff looked up from the grease-spot he was cleaning from his sleeve. "What in the world are you two raving about?" he grumbled. "Happy other Earth! What nonsense is that? There's only one, and lucky we'll be if any of its inhabitants live to talk of it when it's gone!"

CHAPTER VI

A HOSTILE WELCOME

TWENTY-EIGHT days after the ship had soared away, its hull once again gleamed in the bright, direct rays of the sun. Earth grew out of the void like a blue blossom. It was lovely beyond comparison, to the returning voyagers.

"How beautiful and wonderful it is!" murmured Alora. Then she shuddered. "But how horrible to think that in a few years it will be—destroyed!" Her elfin face became tense. "I hope we can convince my father quickly, so that through him the world will be warned without delay!"

"You hope?" echoed Foster, in surprise, that she should have any doubts.

The girl flushed a little. "Marten Crodell is a strange man," she admitted for the first time. "Sometimes I haven't been able to understand him myself—" She broke off and finished more firmly. "But in the face of Dr. Bronzun's evidence, he must believe."

Rolan Foster applied himself to the landing maneuvers. He dropped the ship through Earth's atmosphere almost precipitately, feverishly eager to shout their news to the world. Finally the ship roared at even keel over sunny countryside, shot toward the city that Foster had missed only by a few miles, and landed at the outskirts, before Dr. Bronzun's laboratory-home.

They climbed out thankfully and drew in great lungfulls of sweet air, tinged with that unnameable essence that no other planet duplicated. They had been breathing subnormally oxygenated air aboard the ship,

because of failing supplies, for several days.

"Well, Angus, you old second-guesser!" cried Fostar joyfully, clapping him on the back. "We're back in spite of your numerous prophecies to the contrary!"

The engineer looked sour. "But I smell trouble ahead, gentlemen," he grumbled. "I—and here it is, I think!"

He pointed to the wide lawn beyond the hedges. A large aerocar lay there, emblazoned with the blue and red stripes of the air police, and several uniformed officers approached.

Fostar stared at them wonderingly.

"Captain of the Air Police," the foremost officer introduced himself. "Let me see your departure and landing papers."

"We haven't any," Fostar returned, annoyed at such a detail. "You see, we didn't land on any other planet and therefore we didn't think it necessary to procure the papers. We've been on a test cruise and—"

"Nevertheless, you should have the papers," interrupted the officer coldly. "We've been waiting for your return. You're under arrest!"

"Have you a warrant?" snapped Fostar.

The officer drew one from his pocket. "Here it is—duly sworn out by Marten Crodell!"

"Marten Crodell!" gasped Fostar, looking at Alora. She stared back at him helplessly.

"He will be here in a few moments," continued the officer. "We have notified him of your arrival."

A FEW minutes later a gold-tinted aerocar settled down from the skies and from it stepped Marten

Crodell. His tall, awkward figure, clothed in black, ambled toward them. His austere face showed lines of anger and worry both. But his eyes lit up with relief as his daughter ran into his arms.

"Thank heaven you're safe!" he muttered. Then he drew a mask over his features and singled out Fostar for a malevolent glare.

"Rolan Fostar, you and your Dr. Bronzun are not only fanatics preaching a false doom, but you've withheld a new invention!" the landowner said frostily. "I've been waiting for your return. Finding my daughter gone, a month ago, I came to this place and had it broken into. I found the plans for your new trans-space drive!"

"How did you dare—" choked Fostar.

The landowner went on imperturbably. "As you know, all new inventions relating to space travel must be turned over to the government immediately—a long-standing law of over three hundred years, instituted against the danger of piracy and private conquest. That is your first crime of omission. Where you went with your new drive, driven by your diseased minds, I don't know. But I presume"—his voice became heavily sarcastic—"it had some far-fetched connection with your theory of doom. But I didn't think you would go to such lengths as to kidnap my daughter!"

His voice hissed. "I will indict you for that crime, which is punishable by exile to an asteroid prison!"

"No, father, you can't!" Alora cried wildly. "I wasn't kidnaped. I stowed away, of my own free will! What's more, I love Rolan Fostar!" She stepped to the latter's side, grasping his arm.

Marten Crodell stared aghast, then

shook his head sadly. "What have they done to you, Alora? Alone with three obsessed fools for a month in a space-ship—no wonder your head is turned!"

"Father, you must listen!" the girl interrupted firmly. "I stowed away because I thought you were driving them to a hopeless act. But they're right—about the doom!"

Crorell was still shaking his head. "And I suppose I'm to warn the world!" he said scornfully. "In other words, Alora, they've made you as fanatical as they are!"

Stony-faced, he turned to the white-haired scientist. "I had the Serenity Observatory, on the moon, make a complete check. They report definitely that Earth has a relative velocity toward the heart of the universe. And that's all that matters, because all motion in space-time is relative. Thus your doom-theory is meaningless!"

For the first time that Foster could remember, a deep and terrible anger burned in Dr. Bronzun's patient, kindly face.

"Fools!" he cried, his voice quivering. "They fail to see the truth! Everything in space-time is relative except—the Edge of Space. That is a finite boundary to our universe. All measurements, if based from that reference, become absolute. And the Edge of Space is—appallingly near!"

"Fanatical words!" retorted Marten Crorell dryly. "Without proof!"

"I have proof!"

The words rang sharply from Dr. Bronzun, and Foster and Angus MacLuff looked at each other significantly. The dramatic revelation was due that would astound the world. Alora Crorell looked at her father half pityingly, at the shock that would soon be his.

Dr. Bronzun opened the leather

case he had brought with him from the ship, and drew out his spectrum charts and photographs.

Marten Crorell looked his skepticism.

The scientist held out the proofs, his eyes shining.

But suddenly he drew them back, and his eyes became bewildered. He shuffled the prints, looking at them closely. They were all streaked smears, blotched beyond recognition. Some were completely blank!

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Foster, supporting Dr. Bronzun with one arm as he seemed about to collapse.

"Ruined!" gasped the scientist, in agonized tones. "Every one—obliterated! But how? Good God—how? When I filed them away, they were in perfect condition!" He started. "The mysterious fire we passed through!" he answered himself, in hollow tones. "That electrical phenomenon. It permeated everything in the ship, including this case, and ruined these plates, delicate as they are. God—"

Marten Crorell was smiling cynically. "Just as I thought!" he said mockingly. "Hallucination from beginning to end." He waved an arm to the police officer at his side. "Arrest these men!"

FOSTAR'S thoughts writhed "Listen to reason, Marten Crorell!" he pleaded. "The doom lies out there, for you or anybody to see. Every minute counts. A new planet or system of planets must be found. Earth people must migrate to them. Cities must be built, civilization founded, on new worlds. It is a gigantic task, and the time is so short. In a few years Earth will meet thinning space-time and chaos! And—"

But the landowner turned a deaf ear and waved the police on. Foster

envisioned days and months of court trials, bickerings, and all the claptrap of petty law agencies—and finally, perhaps, isolated imprisonment on a lonely asteroid, for years—

Fostar's muscles tightened. This was not the time to submit tamely!

His next move was so surprising that the police captain was caught unawares. Fostar's hard fist thudded against his chin with a sharp crack, and the officer toppled backward. The following uniformed man lunged forward, but Fostar ducked and crashed his fist against the side of his head.

Shouts broke out and all the policemen surged forward to grapple with him. But now Angus MacLuff leaped beside Fostar with a sort of joyous bray, and his gnarled fists cracked on yielding flesh.

"Run for the ship, Dr. Bronzun!" yelled Fostar. "Quickly!"

The white-haired scientist, divining the desperate plan, hastily moved for the ship. When he was well on his way, the two battling men turned from their antagonists and leaped after him.

"Hope we make it," panted Angus MacLuff, "before they pull their guns—"

"Stop, or we'll shoot!" came the command from behind them when they had run only half the distance to the ship.

Fostar kept running, the engineer with him. By a hopeless miracle, they might not get hit. But no shots rang out.

Instead, they heard Marten Crodell's frantic shriek, "Don't fire! You'll hit my daughter!"

Fostar looked over his shoulder to find Alora Crodell running after, between them and the police! In a moment they had gained the lock and were safe.

"Alora, you brave little fool—" gasped Fostar.

But the girl interrupted, shoving him into the cabin. "Don't waste time—get the ship up. Wherever you're going, I'm going with you!"

"Your engine, Angus!" barked Fostar, leaping for the controls. In a moment the take-off roar of the rockets burst out volcanically and the ship that had so recently returned from the depths of space once again catapulted up from Earth. They negotiated the atmosphere and drummed out into open space.

With the initial excitement over, Dr. Bronzun shook his head dubiously. "This is foolish, in a way. We've escaped Marten Crodell, but he'll have the Space Guard after us—"

"And there they are!" pointed Angus MacLuff. "Gentlemen, we can't escape. We'll be full of holes in a minute!"

"We'll escape them!" promised Fostar grimly. "Dr. Bronzun, switch on the trans-space drive!"

They watched as five Space Guard ships arrowed down from their usual position high above Yorkopolis. Obviously, they had already been notified by radio to watch for the fleeing ship. They were long, sleek craft, bristling with guns, watchdogs against illicit space traffic, smugglers, and pirates who now and then attempted daring raids.

One of the foremost ship's gunnozzles flared redly and a rocket shell burst across their bow—the signal to stop. Following shots would be aimed directly for them, till the ship was crippled.

Fostar used the full acceleration of his engine, but the guard ships relentlessly crawled closer, driven by superpowerful motors. He bit his lips, but at last Dr. Bronzun's voice

called in warning. The scientist manipulated his dials and the strange supermagnetic force rotated them dizzily out of normal space-time. At the same moment, the first three shots puffed from the pursuers—atomic blasts that whooshed uncomfortably close. They would have the range in a second!

Fostar smiled grimly. "Now let them catch us!" He rammed power into his engine.

Their ship surged forward like a frightened thing. A barrage of blasts from the Space Guard's guns sparkled far behind. Looking back, Fostar saw the lights of the five ships dwindle and dim, and finally wink out, lost in the void.

"Can you imagine their faces?" chuckled Fostar. "When they saw our ship crawl away from them like they were drydocked!"

The tense nerves of the four in the ship eased as the danger was over. Alora released her breath in a long sigh. "It's all happened so quickly!" she murmured. "And here we are—back in space!"

"Just what did you have in mind, Rolan?" queried Dr. Bronzun, half dispiritedly. "Going back out to the Beyond, for proof?"

Fostar shook his head thoughtfully.

"No," he explained. "Listen to me, all of you. Now that Marten Crodell and the world have the plans for the trans-space drive, someone will eventually make that trip and bring back proof. But the doom crawls ever nearer!—and mankind has no new world to migrate to! That is by far the most important thing."

He looked around at them, eyes alight. "We'll go out and start the search for our new world!"

"I'm with you!" said Alora instantly. Her eyes were somber. "At

least in some degree, I'll be making up for—my father!"

Fostar squeezed her hand. "Don't feel too bad about him," he murmured gently. "After all, we didn't have proof."

Dr. Bronzun's tired face had lighted up. "Though the record is destroyed, I still remember some of the data of the nearer star groups. The search wouldn't be blind!"

"But gentlemen!" protested Angus Maccluff gloomily. "It is out of the question. We need food, air and fuel supplies, more than we had before, for such a long cruise—and a larger ship to hold them. All that takes money—much money!"

"I have unlimited credit accounts in my own name, on every planet!" said Alora Crodell quickly. "More than I could spend in ten lifetimes!"

"But the instant we land on any planet, in the first place," pursued the engineer, "we'll be apprehended. Marten Crodell has by now sent such a message to every city and outpost!"

Quick depression weighed their spirits. But Fostar suddenly laughed. The others looked at him queerly, as he hastily ran his eyes over the Solar System chart of planetary positions.

"We can go faster than light," he reminded them evenly. "Faster than radio waves, too! We'll go to Ganymede first. The message will take 67 minutes, at the present distance between Earth and Jupiter. We'll be there in five! During the remaining hour, Alora can draw all the funds we need. Then, we'll skip to Titan, beating the message again. Thus, we can land without suspicion, register at some hotel under fictitious names, and quietly buy what we need. No one will know we ever landed on Titan, though they will know we did on Ganymede, and then left again. Perfect, isn't it?"

Angus Maccluff lapsed into a defeated grumble, for the plan seemed foolproof.

CHAPTER VII

SEARCH AND CHASE

IT WORKED, though they had some tense moments. In thriving Jove City, on Ganymede, for lack of landing papers, they paid a fine. Alora presented herself at the city's largest bank, submitted to fingerprinting for identification, and asked for a million dollars, in gilt-edged interplanetary certificates. The remonstrating officials gave in before her stormy threats to have her father sue them to ruination, if they didn't hurry.

They departed from Ganymede just as the Earth message must have come in, for a Space Guard ship gave chase. Foster left it behind with a quiet chuckle, and proceeded to Saturn at a speed, under the trans-space drive, that left radio signals far behind.

Here they had just time enough to land and have their ship slipped into a private hangar for "repairs." Under assumed names, busy days followed. They bought a ship whose trim lines gladdened Foster's critical eyes. Three days of intensive work resulted in the transfer of the trans-space drive apparatus to the new ship's engine. Then supplies were crammed aboard the roomier craft, enough for several months, including weapons and ammunition.

Ten days after they had left Earth, they embarked from Titan and the Solar System, heading out into open space. Their great search had begun—the search for a new world among the enigmatic stars!

Alora sent a message to her father,

via public radiogram service, when they were safely away and could no longer be stopped.

"We are in a large, fully stocked ship, and are going out to other suns, to look for a new Earth! The doom is real, though you do not believe it yet. One day, we will know true forgiveness for one another, when we stand together on the new world, wherever it may be!"

She was weeping softly after Foster had sent the message. "I still love him," she said sadly, "though he has driven me away from him by what he's done!"

Foster comforted her. "Poor darling," he said sympathetically, "you've sacrificed a lot to be aboard this ship." He was remembering the last night they had spent on Titan. They had dared to attend a gala dance, for a brief moment of fun and gaiety in their grim venture. The girl had known much of such carefree pleasure, all her life. Now she had thrust it all behind her.

"But I'm not sorry!" she whispered to him. "That past life of mine has no meaning now—not when the whole human race is faced with extinction!"

A message came back to them from Marten Crodell's private superstation, before Foster had accelerated beyond the speed of light.

"Rolan Foster, you have violated interplanetary law in your escape, and you have earned my final and complete enmity!" came the landowner's voice, quivering with rage. "I hold you responsible for my daughter's mental condition, which is on the verge of an insanity equal to yours, and Dr. Bronzun's." Threat crept into the voice, deep and deadly. "I have nearly completed a trans-space drive. If I can find you, I will destroy you!"

Alora caught her breath. "He

means every word of it!" she gasped. "He's a man of strong, unshakable prejudices. Rolan—he's coming after us!" Her amber eyes reflected alarm.

"Let him try to find us!" said Foster shortly. He grasped the power controls and hurtled the ship from the Solar System, under the trans-space drive. The sun and planets vanished behind them as they attained astronomical velocity.

Their course, previously laid out by Dr. Bronzun, took them in the direction exactly opposite the Edge of Space. Before them lay the entire universe of stars and nebulae, stretching for unnumbered light-years. Space seemed crammed with deceptively near stars, but most were far beyond the reach of even their trans-space drive.

"We are heading for a group of stars—a globular cluster—that lies within 30 light-years of Earth," explained the scientist. "We will then find some 500 stars within 10 light-years of a common point. We will have to hope that some have systems of planets."

"One chance in thousands!" Angus MacIuff deprecated, with a hopeless gesture. "We might spend our lives searching, without finding any."

"Not necessarily," returned the scientist calmly. "It used to be thought that planetary stars were rare. But in a crowded cluster, the chances of the star-collisions that create planets are much higher. Furthermore, more than half the stars are binaries, and these are likely to have planets, because of tidal forces they mutually exert. Our problem will be to find the right type of sun and a livable type of planet."

Foster looked at him thoughtfully. "What if such a world," he asked slowly, "were already inhabited by intelligent life?"

Dr. Bronzun started. "I haven't dared think of that," he confessed, with a nervous gesture. "Well, that is a problem to be reckoned with when and if it arises."

With the trans-space drive functioning smoothly, Foster exceeded the acceleration he had achieved on their trip to the Beyond. He silenced the powerful atomic-motor only when they had reached the fantastic velocity of 500 times that of light! Each second saw 93 million miles reeled off—the distance between Earth and sun! A light-year of space was crossed every 18 hours!

In three weeks, they had hurdled 30 light-years!

During that time, the four adventurers found opportunity to recover from the recent excitement and strain. The trip to the Beyond, with its trying experiences, had been grueling. The final shuddery revelation of Earth's doom, starkly clear, had left them with frayed nerves. The escape from Earth, and Marten Crodell, had also been a tense episode.

Foster, in retrospection, tried to understand Marten Crodell, but failed. The mind of man, at times, could be an inexplicable thing. It resisted instinctively any new revolutionary thought. There had been Galileo, forced by law to deny that the Earth revolved around the sun. And this new concept, involving as it did the annihilation of all Man had known for thousands of years, was not easy to digest. Cranks there had always been, too, who had prophesied the end of Earth, in dozens of holocaustic ways. One could not expect another such doom theory to be instantly accepted—without proof.

In a way, that explained Marten Crodell's opposition, though much more of the personal was involved. A wealthy, fawned-upon figure, he

had been defied, balked, his daughter taken from him, his authority flouted—and men had pride, even in the face of infinity.

But one thing more Foster wondered about Marten Crodell. With the trans-space drive, would he really pursue them, like a Nemesis? Would he be so blind to the more vital issue of Earth's fate as to seek—revenge?

TO THEIR eyes, as they rapidly neared the globular cluster, the usual firmament had given place to one blazing with hundreds of first-magnitude stars. It was a patch of space not nearly so sparsely dotted with stars as in Earth's immediate vicinity.

With a slight warping of course, Foster was able to aim directly for a yellowish blue sun that Dr. Bronzun pointed out. It grew rapidly, and Foster brought their ship to a halt when it blazed in the firmament with about Sol's intensity as seen from Mars. Dr. Bronzun carefully swept the heavens with his electro-telescope all that day, but no slightest sign of a planetary body appeared.

"There are several comets and swarms of meteors," he reported disappointedly, "but no worlds. Let us go on!"

Another yellow star, in the crowded cluster, lay within two light-years and two days later they were hovering near it, hopefully. But this sun, too, proved a lonely one, unattended by even the smallest of planets. They passed a half dozen more in the following week, strung like beads along some celestial string. Not all were uniform in type. Three were binaries, majestically circling doublets. One was a giant red star, tenuous and comparatively cool. Another

was a white dwarf, tiny but blindingly brilliant.

None had planets.

"We are searching for a needle in a haystack," pronounced Angus Mac-luff dourly, "and we can't even find the haystack."

Foster tried to make some hopeful remark, but the immensity of the task before them loomed starkly. Alora Crodell seemed to have her thoughts elsewhere. Even Dr. Bronzun's calm nature seemed dull, apathetic.

And then—the next star brought hammering pulses, for seven planets revolved about it!

"At last!" breathed Dr. Bronzun, looking up from his telescopic observations. "Head for the fifth. It seems to be about the size of Earth!"

But they did not land, for the scientist's gauges showed a flood of the sun's rays at that distance. They could feel it in their cabin, despite the refrigerator's automatic compensation.

"This planet's surface must be baked similar to Mercury's heat-blasted surface. This star, unfortunately, is a class-B type—dozens of times hotter than our sun. The four nearer bodies must be withered hulks. But perhaps the last two—"

The sixth proved almost airless and waterless, with struggling patches of sparse vegetation over its rocky surface. Dr. Bronzun shook his head and the approached the last planet. It was a gigantic one, as large as Saturn, and surrounded by a writhing, stormy mass of violent atmosphere. Foster attempted a landing, but halfway through the atmosphere, the ship tossed about like a cork. He was barely able to win his way back to safety in open space.

"We couldn't inhabit a world like

that!" he panted. "We couldn't even land our ships!"

And they left this star with its unpropitious worlds.

On they went, seeking. . . .

Strangely, the very next star they approached, a binary, proved to have a set of planets around the smaller of the two suns. "The great pull of the larger sun," surmised Dr. Bronzun, "raised tidal effects on the smaller sun. Masses were eventually thrown off that became circling planets." His eyes glowed as he made observations. "The small sun is almost a twin of Sol. And it seems to have dozens of planets!"

But disappointments were in store. The planets they paid passing visits, one by one, were small, none larger than Earth's moon. They were all crowded in narrow orbits close to their primary, dancing about at prodigious velocities, and rotating like whirling dervishes.

"Useless pebbles," summarized Angus Maccluff. "Human brains would become addled, living on them!"

"Wait!" cried Dr. Bronzun, as they were about to leave. "I almost missed it. There's a larger planet some ways out and it looks worth visiting."

At about the distance of Ceres from the sun, the final planet appeared, an Earth-sized body whose atmosphere was almost opaque. Foster slowly circled the globe till he had the feel of its gravity, then lowered into the steamy air-envelope. They stared down eagerly. There was a blue ocean visible, and the winding threads of rivers. The land area was almost uniformly flat and overgrown with lush vegetation. A steamy fog hazed detail.

"It looks very much like Venus!"

said Alora excitedly. "I hope its air is breathable!"

"It is probably a primeval world," muttered Angus Maccluff, "and not a fit abode for civilized beings."

"We'll soon find out," promised Foster, bringing their ship down in a wide clearing of what seemed to be rife jungle.

For a while, after the landing, they lay in their bunks to let their muscles become accustomed to the pull of gravity—a sensation absent for the past few weeks. Then they arose to look out. Under the mixed light of two suns, colors changed constantly. Queer double shadows slowly dissolved into one another.

Abundant life manifested itself around them. The jungle nearby fairly crawled with slinking forms. Here and there beasts pounced on one another in the universal quest for food. It was a rich, prolific world, at first glance.

"Carboniferous environment," said Dr. Bronzun. "We can breathe the air, wearing the Venus-masks for filtering out excess carbon dioxide."

"But we'll go out well armed," warned Foster, "and keep sharp watch for danger."

THEY stepped from the cool, regulated temperature of their space-ship into the hot humidity of the planet's climate. The air came through their masks warm and soggy, but with an exhilarating tang that they enjoyed. It was the odor of life and growing things. They could hear a steady murmur in the air. Overhead wheeled exotic birds. Insects buzzed from hidden sources.

Alora Crodell, glad to be free of the cramped quarters, capered away from the ship lightly, over a carpet of thick grasses and leaves. Foster ran after her and caught her arm.

"Not too far!" he warned, his voice reproduced by a resonator in the filter-mask. "We don't know what monsters—"

As though he had summoned one, a towering bulk twenty feet high emerged from the jungle edge, a hundred yards off. Half-bear and half-dinosaur, the nameless horror lumbered forward with a screeching roar, straight for them.

"Run!" barked Foster, shoving the girl toward the ship. Then he jerked out his blast-pistol and fired. Designed to stop the biggest beasts in the solar system, the gun's atomic-charge sent its lightning blast against the beast's scaly hide. A gaping, smoking wound appeared, but the monster came on, screaming its rage.

Foster fired again and turned to run, with a hopeless feeling that he would be overtaken. He heard its hoarse pant close behind him. For all of its size, the creature was fast.

Then he heard the welcome crack of an atomic-rifle, and the beast's small head vanished, blown to atoms. The body, still vested with life, blundered on past Foster and the ship and back into the jungle. For another few seconds they heard its crashing progress, before it stilled.

The nightmarish incident left Foster with shaking nerves. "Thanks, Angus," he said simply. Alora ran trembling into his arms, too unnerved to say a word.

"This is not a world for humans," vouched Angus MacLuff, leaning on his rifle.

"No, it isn't," agreed Dr. Bronzun. "It would be a constant struggle for survival, till the jungles had been cleared. It was hard enough on Venus, establishing a few cities in the past 500 years. We will have to find a world much more suited for

quick settlement. Come, let's leave—"

"Look!"

It was a sharp exclamation from Alora. She was pointing up, and they saw something smooth and shiny descending from the sky.

"A ship!" gasped Dr. Bronzun. "Is it possible that other intelligence—"

"No, it's an Earth ship!" cried Foster. "And only one person could have brought it here—Marten Crodell!"

He looked at Alora and saw the quick alarm in her eyes. Though they had not spoken of it since leaving Earth, they had wondered if this moment would arrive—and what it would mean. What amazing relentlessness had driven the man to pursue them across greater space?

The ship, somewhat smaller than theirs, landed a hundred yards away. A few minutes later four men stepped out, equipped with breathing masks. They advanced, stumbling for a moment in the unaccustomed gravity, but quickly recovered. The leader, tall and awkward, was Marten Crodell, his dark thin face gleaming from behind his visor. The men following wore the uniforms of interplanetary police. All were armed with pistols held before them.

Foster stiffened and drew his own weapon. Alora trembled at his side. Angus MacLuff almost casually raised his rifle to the crook of his arm, in readiness. What strange drama of human emotions was about to be enacted under the shifting shadows and lights of an alien double sun?

The approaching party stopped fifty feet away. Marten Crodell swept his eyes over the group, his gaze lingering a moment on his daughter.

"Father!" exclaimed Alora chokingly.

"Alora, come here!" commanded the land-owner.

"I won't!" she cried quickly. "Until you put down your guns and tell me what madness this is!"

Marten Crodell's eyes burned across to Foster's, his face hard, determined. "You and your two companions are under arrest, Rolan Foster!" he barked. "The situation hasn't changed just because you've left the Solar System. My trans-space drive was finished the day after you left. I've tracked you through space simply enough by tracing your rocket-residue. My companions are expert in that art, developed to trail pirates. There was some retracing at times because of the faintness of the trail, but now we've caught you and—"

"But good God!" exploded Foster. "With the trans-space drive, you could have gone out to the Beyond yourself, and seen the truth—or at least disproved our claims, instead of wasting all this time and effort chasing us!"

Marten Crodell waved a hand. "You brought back no proof," he reminded. "Your claims are preposterous. Convinced of that, I followed you." His eyes burned with animosity. "I can't forgive what you've done to my daughter—poisoned her mind with your own wild theories. However, back on Earth, an expedition will be sent to the Beyond, before you are convicted for your alarmist machinations."

"But the time wasted!" groaned Foster. "That's why we shirked the trivial counts against us, to search for a new world. Stop to think, Marten Crodell—suppose we are right? Every golden minute wasted may mean thousands of lives lost!"

"I won't mince words with you!" snapped the land-owner. His eyes

flashed dangerously. "I said I would destroy you, Rolan Foster. I will—if you resist!" He waved his gun eloquently.

Quick anger burned in Foster. The motives of Marten Crodell, in the light of Earth's fate, were blind, petty, unreasoning. But words alone would not change him.

"Marten Crodell," said Foster decisively, "we're not going back to Earth!"

The land-owner glared and then stepped forward, motioning his men with him. Four menacing guns faced Foster and his party. The first shot fired would precipitate battle—death. It seemed like an unreal nightmare.

Alora Crodell, with a low moan, had flung herself forward, as though to stand between the two parties. But suddenly she stopped, horror-struck.

It had happened with stunning rapidity. Marten Crodell's foot had stumbled against something lying half concealed in the thick grasses over the ground. Instantly, a long, whip-like cord encircled his legs and began winding itself around his body. Slimy and worm-like, the tentacle pulled its victim to the ground, squeezing.

Before they could take warning, the other three men had stumbled into similar lianas vested with boa-constrictor-like life, and all four were writhing on the ground, shouting feebly. In seconds, their faces were purple as the powerful coils tightened like steel springs. Another of this prolific planet's deadly life-forms had manifested itself!

With a choked cry, Alora leaped toward her father. Foster sprang after her, and pulled her short. "Watch out—there may be others!"

"But we must help him!" moaned the girl. "He's being—killed!"

"Stay back, all of you!" warned Foster. Alone, he moved forward as rapidly as he dared, peering intently into the grasses before his feet. He was able to advance to within twenty feet of the captured men before he saw a thick, snake-like object across his path. It quivered as though in anticipation of a victim.

Foster hastily followed its length with his eyes and saw where it vanished into a smooth hole in the ground. It was some sort of giant worm that lay half on the surface, waiting for chance victims!

Foster sent a blast from his gun at the juncture of the hole. With a sucking sound, the horrible creature jerked back into its hole, but leaving its severed end writhing over the ground. With desperate haste, Foster moved forward and cut three more of the worm-monsters in half. Then he stood before Marten Crodell, whose cries had subsided to low, breathless whimpers.

Foster quickly found the creature's hole and blasted with his gun. With soundless agony, the huge worm uncoiled itself and writhed away. Marten Crodell's limp body lay still, with the marks of the constriction pressed into his clothes and throat.

Realizing that he must work fast to save the other three men, Foster turned to them, but at that moment something jerked him off his feet. Unwarily, he had tripped against a waiting worm-monster whose coils whipped about his body with machine-like swiftness and deadly purpose. His gun was knocked from his hand and his arms were pinned to his sides. He fell over and the crushing coils relentlessly drew tighter.

Already gasping for breath, he

dimly saw Angus Maccluff running toward him. Before he arrived, dancing spots were in front of Foster's vision and he felt his eyes and tongue protruding. Then swift and merciful blackness cut off his agony. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

THE NEW WORLD

FOSTER awoke with a pain in his chest, but otherwise sound. He found himself in his bunk, in the ship, and in the next bunk lay Marten Crodell. Angus and Alora had been tending them both. Dr. Bronzun stood at the side, with a look of relief on his face.

"You're both all right," pronounced the engineer, looking at his patients critically. "But a few more squeezes by that blasted worm—"

Alora left the side of her father to kiss Foster tenderly. "You were brave!" she whispered.

Foster looked around. There was no one else in the ship. "The other three men?" he queried.

"Gone, lad!" said Angus Maccluff. "I had scarcely time to rescue you, after you had done the same for Crodell. I shot the worms that had the others, but the men were dead, life squeezed out. They had already been half-drained of blood. Vampire-worms! Ah, gentlemen, the rest of us are lucky to leave this planet alive!"

"I think we had better leave as soon as possible," suggested Dr. Bronzun, "without even attempting to bury the men, or retrieve anything from the other ship. It's too dangerous to step out again."

Foster nodded and left his bunk. He paused beside the reclining form of Marten Crodell. He was breathing heavily, and his skin still had a mot-

tled appearance from the near strangulation he had undergone. There was lurking horror in his eyes, from his experience, but a thankfulness in them as he looked up.

"You saved my life, Foster," he gruffly acknowledged. "I'm obligated to you to that extent."

"Forget it," shrugged Foster. He went on, earnestly. "Why can't we be friends, Marten Crodell? It's all been a misunderstanding between us—"

He had extended his hand, but the land-owner ignored it. His hostile attitude reasserted itself. "Are you heading back for Earth?" he asked.

"This ship is going on!" stated Foster quietly.

"But you'll eventually have to go back," hissed Crodell. "And back on Earth, we'll have a reckoning!"

Foster shook his head wearily. "You don't realize—" he began, then started again. "All right, but for the present, you can have the freedom of the ship, if you promise not to oppose us in any way."

"I'll neither help nor hinder you in your fanciful searchings for a new world!" retorted the landowner with fine scorn.

UNDER this truce, the party of five went on in its cosmic search in the crowded star-cluster. Each star they visited gave them renewed hope, only to prove bitter disappointment. Many had no planetary systems. Those that did displayed circling worlds whose utterly alien environments could not be a home to the human race. An air of hopelessness rode with the ship.

Alora tried to be optimistic, though at times her amber eyes were dulled and apathetic. Dr. Bronzun searched the heavens with a weary patience, picking out their course from sun to sun. Marten Crodell watched with

a cynical indifference. He spoke little, even to his daughter. Between them was a barrier of estrangement, human nature being what it was.

Foster felt a brooding dread of the future stealing over him, with their many disappointments. There should be many ships searching, plumbing the stars. Finding a world was such a small part of it, anyway. After that, the bigger tasks remained—building transport ships, settling the new world, solving the thousand and one new problems that would arise when mankind changed its age-old home.

And there was so little time! The doom was so near!

Angus Maccluff's mutterings were doleful in the extreme. "It is too much to hope for," he would often say. "We will never find a suitable world!"

And then, as though his every dire prophecy must be contradicted, they found it!

Two weary months had gone by before they came upon this yellow star whose warm light filled their cabin with a beautiful golden glow.

"Spectral class G0!" observed Dr. Bronzun excitedly, busy with his instruments. "Just slightly bigger and hotter than Sol. And it has several planets in comparable positions!"

Pulses throbbing, they approached, passing the orbits of several cold, outermost planets. Two of them were ringed like Saturn, striking a familiar note. One of them had five great moons. The fifth outward planet glinted redly, something like Mars, though it had a moon so big that it was almost a binary planet, rather than primary and satellite.

The first two planets, on the same side of the sun, were cloudy and veiled, like twin Venuses. In the next orbit, as a surprise, was a gigantic

planet, with a dozen attendant satellites. It was like a misplaced Jupiter, with heavy bands of vari-colored atmosphere.

More and more it looked like the Solar System somewhat rearranged, and when, on the other side of the sun, they came upon the fourth planet, its two polar ice-caps and blue halo of atmosphere stabbed through their hearts.

There, to judge by appearances alone, lay a world one might mistake for Earth itself!

"It's beautiful — unbelievable!" Alora was murmuring, with a catch in her voice.

"The exact prototype of Earth, as seen from a space-ship," whispered Foster.

"Looks are deceiving," grumbled Angus Macluff dourly. "It might have a poisonous atmosphere!"

Dr. Bronzun looked up from his spectroscope. "No, Angus," he vouched. "The atmosphere is like Earth's to a remarkable degree. Distance from this sun, about 100 million miles. Temperature and climate must be similar, too, and it has about the same inclination of the axis!" His voice held a low eagerness. "I think this world will prove a new Earth!"

Foster stared moodily. "And that brings up the question of previous intelligent life!" Glances were exchanged, but no further comment was made on the subject, though it loomed large now.

The landscape they were cruising over a few hours later was lushly green, dimpled with lakes sparkling in the sunshine. Forests and widespread verdure gave evidence of a rich soil. A lofty mountain range climbed over the horizon and the basin beyond was rolling prairie, splayed by silvery threads of rivers.

The setting was arboreal, peaceful and somehow—unfulfilled. So like Earth it was that they had been half expecting cities, farms, winding roads. But no sign of civilization greeted them.

Dr. Bronzun heaved a sigh of relief. "A world, waiting for us!"

"What's that up ahead?" Alora was pointing.

Something grayish and widespread lay half-concealed by vegetation, shadowed by great trees. Foster spiraled the ship over it and they saw it to be a collection of hoary ruins, of some once-great city. Drawn by a natural curiosity as they all were, Foster made a landing in a clear grassy area at the outskirts of the dead city.

The air they breathed, when they stepped out, had the heavenly scent of a clean, bright world, filled with the good things of nature. Warm, tingling sunlight bathed their skins and a cool breeze whispered through nearby trees. The soil, black and rich, crunched underfoot. Off in the distance, snow-capped mountains sparkled and seemed to look down benignly.

"A new Earth!" Dr. Bronzun said, confirming his previous conjecture.

"And perhaps a better one!" added Foster, filling his lungs again and again.

But Alora, close at his side, trembled a little. "I have a strange feeling that we're being—watched!" she murmured, flicking her eyes nervously over their surroundings.

"Feminine intuition?" laughed Foster. "There are probably animals in the forest, eyeing us. But we've seen that no higher life-forms rule the planet."

"But those ruins!" grumbled Angus Macluff, staring at them. "No present civilization, and the ruins of

a former one—what's the answer? Mark my words, gentlemen, all is not as simple as it looks!"

"We'll look over those ruins," said Dr. Bronzun. "They strike an incongruous note in this propitious environment."

Fostar nodded, but his eyes were bright. "I can already picture a new city rising on this site—many cities, over this world, inhabited by transplanted mankind." He met the dark eyes of Marten Crodell.

The land-owner smiled thinly. "A splendid colony world," he acknowledged, looking around as though surveying a future addition to his holdings.

CHAPTER IX

THE PLANET BEINGS

AN HOUR later, after eating, they stepped out again, save for Marten Crodell. Still contemptuous of their purpose, he watched them leave with glittering eyes.

Fostar led the way toward the ruins. Lightly clothed, they enjoyed the exhilaration of open air, unconfined spaces. Though armed, they had no sense of danger in the peaceful setting. The bright, overhead sun shafted down pleasantly.

A few hundred yards from the ship, they came to the first of the ruins. Half-tumbled walls of stone threw cool shadows over piled-up debris. Here and there a skeleton tower of some stubborn metal upreared, with gaping spaces leering like empty eye-sockets. They looked down a wide avenue whose torn, uprooted paving suggested repeated bombings. Had warfare visited this once great city of some intelligent race of beings?

It was a mystery that defied casual inspection. Over everything lay the thick dust of centuries and the crawling green of lichenous plants. They peered into empty spaces that might once have been chambers. All sign of the inhabitants and their paraphernalia had vanished, disintegrated by time.

The four humans moved along on the eerie atmosphere of the place. Even Angus Maccluff found no appropriate words for the occasion.

Alora stopped suddenly, looking back half-longingly at their ship, which was barely visible behind rock heaps. "I feel—eyes!" she breathed, shuddering. "Eyes watching our every move!"

"The ghosts of the dead!" Angus Maccluff said solemnly.

Fostar started. He was willing to dismiss the girl's vague apprehension and the engineer's superstitious fantasy, but he had heard a sound—a soft, pattering sound that stood out clearly in the hushed silence of the dead city. Ghosts did not make sounds.

And it was certainly no ghost that suddenly confronted them, around the edge of a huge fallen slab of stone.

They gasped in chorus. It was an alien creature—solid, substantial, and—by a subtle aura—intelligent!

In a flood of amazement, the four humans took in the creature's details.

Four feet high, it stood upright on two stalk-like legs. Its body was flat and broad and from both sides extended four willowy arms terminating in thin tendril-like fingers. The head was round with a crown of petals that stood out stiffly in the sunlight. It had no mouth, nose or ears, and only one great gleaming eye. All its skin surface, unadorned

by clothing, was a bright green.

"Moving vegetable life!" gasped Dr. Bronzun. "A creature without lungs that synthesizes its food from the air, like plants!"

"A walking sunflower!" snorted Angus Maccluff.

"Can it really be intelligent?" murmured Alora, wonderingly. "And does its race rule this planet?"

At that moment, as though to give a definite sign of its intelligence, the plant-being raised a hand clutching a tubular, metallic instrument, opposing their further progress.

Fostar whipped out his own gun, in readiness, but no hostile move came from the creature. And then, from around the stone, crowded a dozen more of the beings, all with similar tubular weapons. They lined up in a menacing array.

"Looks like they're telling us to go back!" Fostar grunted. "I wish we could communicate with them and find out what all this means."

"They have no mouths to speak with," mused Dr. Bronzun thoughtfully. "Telepathic impulses have been detected in the highly-developed plant-forms of Rhea. I wonder if these vegetal-beings use telepathy—" He stopped as a voice seemed to interrupt him.

"Yes, we use telepathy. We will be able to communicate with each other by that means, if you think strongly. Do you understand?"

Fostar knew he hadn't heard any spoken words, not even in his brain. His mind had simply received a telepathic message and had automatically translated it into words. It was an uncanny sensation. He saw by the faces of his companions that they too had "heard."

"Yes, we understand," he returned, speaking aloud so the others would hear, and at the same time

concentrating on the thought, hoping he was "projecting" it.

Apparently he had. "Good!" came back in ghostly, silent words. "Who are you? Where have you come from—some other planet?"

"Yes—" Fostar hesitated. Should he go on and tell of their purpose? Too late, he realized that in merely thinking of the matter, he was revealing it to the aliens. "Don't think about our plans!" he tried to warn the others.

But the plant-being's psychic voice, half mockingly, said: "We have read the thought, man of Earth, in all four of your minds!"

THE plant-beings had all stiffened, and were fingering their weapons. Their spokesman went on:

"You have come from another star, and from a world similar to this one. Your world, with its sun, is plunging toward some strange catastrophe. You have been seeking a new world for your race to migrate to. This one would be much to your liking. All this we have read in your minds!"

Fostar attempted no denial. Obviously, he could not lie very convincingly by telepathy, when his innermost thoughts contradicted him from start to finish. Trained by constant use of their psychic sense, the aliens could undoubtedly read the most sensitive thoughts. Fostar said nothing, waiting to see what they would do about the situation.

The telepathic voice resounded in their brains again:

"This is our world, people of Earth! You have no right to it. We will not let you take our world from us!" The voice went on searchingly. "We have had tailings of your other thoughts—how you have many ships, many weapons. You are a powerful

race. Therefore, lest our world be attacked, we must kill you, so that your fellow-men will not learn of the way to come here!"

The tubular weapons of the aliens aimed threateningly. Foster's muscles tensed, preparing for action.

"Wait!"

The word rang out from Dr. Bronzun, commandingly. The plant-people hesitated, as they received the word's telepathic counterpart.

"You are right!" continued the scientist. "We have no claim to your world! We had only planned to take it if it were uninhabited by another race. Now, since we know otherwise, our people will never attack you." He sighed. "We will leave your world immediately. We must search for another!"

Foster knew the scientist was sincere, but he himself did not feel the issue was that clear-cut. To kindly Dr. Bronzun, right was right. But what if there were no other world to be found? Earth would be desperate. Only one stark law counted in the end — survival of the fittest and strongest, even in this larger sense, involving worlds.

And then his face burned as reply came from the alien: "You who have just spoken mean what you say, but we see other thoughts in your companion's minds. The tall man does not see the issue that plainly. The other man is thinking that your race deserves this world more than we. Thus, we surmise that if you returned, your fellowmen would also be divided in opinion. We would probably be attacked after all."

The psychic voice became a sibilant threat: "No, we must kill you—"

Before the message was completed, Foster had barked a quick warning:

"Run for the nearest stone pile—hurry!"

The four Earth people, as one, leaped to the side. Foster heard the sharp clatter of the aliens' weapons, but the shots went wild. Foster whirled and pumped a half-dozen gun-blasts backward. Several of the plant-beings crumpled to the ground, half-torn to pieces. Thick sap, pale green in color, spurted from the bodies.

The swiftness of the move had taken the aliens unawares. Not one of their shots was close, and in seconds the four humans were behind a heap of fallen masonry, safe for the time being. Peering cautiously around an edge, Foster saw the aliens scampering for safety. He picked off two before the rest had scrambled behind something. But then he saw, with a worried frown that more of the green beings were running up from a distance.

He turned to the others, reloading his gun while talking. "We've got to get back to the ship as quickly as possible," he panted. "Come on. We'll work our way back down the avenue, keeping undercover wherever we can."

Crouching low, they crept behind their bulwark. Shots from the aliens spanged over their heads, chipping bits of stone from above.

"Bullets!" muttered Dr. Bronzun. "Their weapons must be the primitive explosive-propellant type, such as we had on Earth five centuries ago."

"Not very effective," grunted Foster. "At least we have that advantage." He had read about the bullet-weapons. A vital spot had to be struck for death. With their atomic-blast guns, every hit was a death.

Running from one rock-pile to the next, they worked their way down

the avenue. At each cleared space, Foster and Angus MacLuff laid down a scorching barrage before they ran through. The numbers of the enemy had been reinforced. Their petaled heads bobbed behind every stone. But their combined marksmanship, probably because of their single-eyed vision without perspective, was fortunately poor. However, the humans at times heard bullets whistle past their ears.

And then, suddenly, they were trapped!

GREEN bodies appeared ahead, sneaking to ambush them at the next rock-pile. All four fired desperately, heaping broken green corpses over the ground, but more aliens ran up, recklessly. They were apparently determined to stop the Earth people at any cost!

Running toward the tumbled walls at the avenue's edge, shots suddenly came from above! Plant-beings were converging from that direction, swarming over broken stone-blocks. Foster swept the first row with blasting death and looked around wildly for escape from the trap.

"We'll never get out of this alive, gentlemen!" predicted Angus MacLuff dismally. Nevertheless, he pumped away with both hands, spreading a livid fusillade of death among the green-skinned beings that began to swarm up from three sides. Dr. Bronzun and Alora, though unused to weapons, did their part in driving the attack back.

But it could not keep up forever. Bullets were whistling uncomfortably close and the charge-clips in their belts, for their own weapons, were limited in number.

"Follow me!" shouted Foster.

He had seen the way of escape.

Between two huge leaning slabs of stone, the path was clear, down what had once been a street at right angles. Foster shoved the others through, firing steadily back at the aliens, keeping them at a distance. Then he slipped between the stones himself. He felt something thud against his shoulder, but took no notice.

On the other side, they raced fleetly along the side avenue, but were brought up abruptly by an impassable mass. Blocked! Some great building had, in the past, fallen squarely across the street.

"They're coming again!" cried Alora, looking back.

Feet pattering noisily, the plant-men appeared, hot in chase!

"We can't climb over this barrier, or go back," panted Dr. Bronzun. He moaned a little. "We're caught!"

"No we aren't!" contradicted Foster. He pointed. "Look—that corridor leading into a building. Seems to be clear—"

There was not much time to conjecture, and they ran toward it. Penetrating into a half-standing structure, the corridor led into dank gloom. The air was musty, confined. Dust that might have lain for centuries swirled up from their feet, choking them. A tomb-like silence hung heavy as an intangible shroud. But better this than the vengeful demons outside, thirsting for their lives.

The passageway twisted and twined as they followed it, in accordance with some strange architectural plan of the builders. Rooms opened out at times, most of them fallen in, and from their doorways speared in shafts of diffused outer light.

They stopped for a moment to listen for sounds of pursuit, but there

were none. The enemy seemed to have given up the chase into this dim hall.

"They probably shun dark places," surmised Dr. Bronzun. "Sunlight and open air are their life."

"Then they can't very well have built this city," mused Foster. "What kind of race did?" He shrugged and turned to a more practical consideration. "We'll follow this passage till it leads out somewhere and then we can get back to our ship."

They trudged along, coughing and shivering in the dank, musty atmosphere. The hall seemed interminable. Twice they found the way blocked, where the overhead arch had collapsed, and had to retrace their steps to cross-corridors. These wound in different directions. Confused, they hesitated and wondered if they were lost in some great catacomb.

But at last the glow of bright sunshine ahead greeted them. They stepped out thankfully into open air. Foster had them all peer warily in every direction before they fully exposed themselves. No plant-men were in sight.

"They're probably still waiting at the other end," chuckled Foster, "hoping we'll come out. There's no time to lose, though, if they scout around for us. Let's get back to the ship." He stepped forward with a brisk step.

"Wait—which way are you going?" Dr. Bronzun's voice was puzzled. "The ship is in that direction, isn't it?" He pointed directly opposite.

"Gentlemen, you're both wrong—" began Angus MacIuff.

Baffled, they looked at one another.

"I don't think any of us knows where the ship lies!" whispered Alora. "We're—lost!"

CHAPTER X

THE GREAT MIGRATION

AROUND them was a new section of the city ruin, totally unfamiliar. The trip through the tortuous passage had completely upset their sense of direction. The sun had been at the zenith when they had left the ship, offering no clue to their position.

Without wasting time, Foster clambered to the highest point of a partially tumbled wall and squinted narrowly in all directions. Though the ship must be visible, if the view were unobstructed, he could not see it—only the heaped ruins, all around. Worst of all, he could not make out the avenue on which they had first been attacked. Dim lines of thoroughfares, in the ancient city, were scattered in all directions. He could not know which was theirs. They were lost!

"See our ship, lad?" called up Angus anxiously.

Foster shook his head worriedly. Then he tried to duck, but too late. He had been seen by one of the plant-men, also atop a high point looking around. Foster scrambled down.

"They'll be after us in a minute again!" he said. "We'll hide in the passage—hurry!"

Crouching within the shadows of the corridor, they watched as dozens of plant-people came pattering from several directions, searching every vantage. One alien peered directly into their retreat, and they froze into breathless statues. The creature finally shivered distastefully and left, unaware of them. The group gradually moved along, out of sight, and the hunted humans stepped out.

"Our lives hang by a thread!" said

Angus Macluff sonorously. "The moment they find us they'll kill us, the blood-thirsty savages!"

"We would do the same, in their place," sighed Dr. Bronzun. "In their eyes, we're the forerunners of a ruthless, powerful race. And in the last analysis, we have no right to this world. It is theirs, by right of birth and evolution. It would be wrong to wrest it from them, no matter how ideal this planet is for our race. A cosmic crime!"

"Yes, I suppose that's true," muttered Foster. He reflected that this problem was by far the most important facing mankind in its exodus from Earth—to find a suitable world uninhabited by previous intelligence.

"But," he added, "we have our personal problem, here and now—to reach our ship." He snapped on his belt-radio. "There's just a chance that Marten Crodell heard the shots and is trying to contact us—"

The little instrument hissed out as he turned up the power, but the ether was silent. Unhooking the tiny microphone he barked into it: "Foster calling Marten Crodell!"

He repeated the call several times before giving up, with a shake of his head.

"Like a fool," he said in self-reproach, "I neglected to arrange specified contact, on the hour, when we left."

"Don't blame yourself," admonished Alora. "Everything looked so peaceful and quiet on this new world. None of us dreamed any of this might happen. But father will try to make contact soon, alarmed at our absence."

Foster nodded. "I'll try the radio every fifteen minutes. I can't keep it open or the batteries will burn out too soon." He strode forward. "In the meantime, we'll keep moving in

hopes of striking the right avenue. Keep a watchful eye out for our green friends!"

Eyes darting about, they stepped along among the ruins of a once-magnificent city. More and more Foster pondered about the race that had been the inhabitants—certainly not the plant-people, who were more or less children of nature, requiring open sunlight. Were the builders extinct?—or had they moved to some other part of the planet?

Foster stopped suddenly as something caught his eye. For a moment, he had almost imagined seeing a human figure perched on the next pile of rock debris. They approached and saw what it was—a stone statue, miraculously unbroken. Amazed, they examined its clean-cut limbs, straight body, finely-shaped head.

"Why it's—it's almost human!" gasped Alora, her amber eyes widening.

It was, though there were differences. The feet were small and had six toes, as the small hands had six delicate fingers. Its legs were long and its body lean, perhaps seven feet tall. The face was rather large and heavy-set. Yet the living form, from which the statue had been modeled, must certainly have resembled man more nearly than any of the anthropoids of Earth itself!

"The builders of the city!" breathed Foster. He pointed to a sort of frieze lying next to the statue. In miniature, dozens of the semi-human figures were represented, doing various tasks.

They went on. Every fifteen minutes Foster tried the radio, hoping for contact with Marten Crodell. At times he climbed fallen blocks and walls for a chance view of the ship, but could see no more than ruins. Yet his thoughts, strangely, were oc-

cupied mainly with the mystery of the vanished city-builders. He felt, somehow, that there was some significant relationship between them and the green plant-people.

Turning a corner, Alora's sharp gasp warned Foster. His finger was already pressing the trigger of his gun, when he spied the alien they had come upon. He was alone, rooted in surprise. Foster suddenly eased up on his trigger.

"Don't shoot!" he warned the others. Then he spoke to the alien, concentrating on the thought. "Throw away your weapon, don't call your fellows—and we won't kill you! I want to speak with you!"

THE plant-man stared for a moment with his great single eye, as though digesting the strange offer. Then he tossed his weapon away, as any reasoning creature might, under the circumstances.

"I will talk with you," he agreed.

Foster led the creature into a shadowed nook among heaped stone blocks. They were not likely to be seen, save in one direction, and Foster told Angus to keep sharp watch for other aliens.

"This is going to be in the nature of a cross-examination," Foster informed the others.

He faced the captive. "What is the story of the race who built this city?" he asked, wondering if he would get coherent information.

"Our race destroyed them!" replied the green being, quite readily, his telepathic voice reverberating clearly in the Earth people's minds. "They were Eaters, much like you in appearance. They had many cities. They ruled this planet, at one time. We destroyed them all. They are extinct today. We rule their world now!"

"Their world!" echoed Foster, catching his breath. "Did you come from another world?"

The plant-man's crown of petals flipped in what might have corresponded to a nod. "Our race evolved on—" Then he stopped suddenly, as though abruptly realizing the significance of what he was revealing.

Foster pointed the barrel of his gun directly at the creature's eye. "You will talk—or die!" he threatened grimly.

The plant-man unmistakably quailed. With him, as with perhaps any other creature in the universe, the individual will to live was a dominant factor. For a moment, his unwinking eye stared with stubborn defiance, and then he said:

"The next outward planet, the fifth, is our home world!"

"Go on!" commanded Foster, glancing around at his companions. "How did your race get to this planet? How did you destroy the Eaters? Tell me as much as you can!"

"It is a long story," returned the alien. "I do not know all of it. Much of it is almost legend. About five thousand" — Foster's mind interpreted the next vague term as "years"—"ago, our race achieved a peak of civilization. We were the dominant life-form. Our world had always been a prolific floral environment. Evolution produced a moving plant-form—our ancestral type—that prospered because it could seek its own sunlight, instead of struggling against all other rooted plants. Intelligence evolved, with our limbs. And telepathy, since we had no"—the appropriate word seemed to be "vocal chords," in Foster's mind.

The plant-man resumed.

"But our sun had been gradually cooling from its original super-hot

state. Sunlight, our very life, fell in intensity. When we achieved space-travel, we came to this world and found it much more suitable. We multiplied rapidly, through spore reproduction. The Eaters, a rising civilization, objected. War flamed!"

The alien stirred, as though coming to the climax of his narrative. "We prevailed! Two thousand years ago, the last city of the Eaters fell to our hordes and weapons. We had gained a new world!"

"Murder!" whispered Fostar tensely. "Race murder!"

The plant-man seemed to sigh, ignoring the accusation. "Since then, as some of us maintain, we have degenerated. Life has been too easy on this new world. Much of our science is lost. We do not even have space-ships anymore! We have only one primitive weapon, for protection against wild beasts. We spend our time sunning ourselves, absorbing the good things of this world—"

The telepathic impulses of the plant-man became fainter and rambling, as though he were thinking to himself, and had forgotten his audience.

Fostar sprang up, eyes glowing. "There's our answer, Dr. Bronzun!" he exclaimed. "We have as much right to this world as they have. They murdered an entire race, ruthlessly. Is there any reason now why we can't lead our people here?"

"None at all!" agreed the scientist, heaving a sigh with the release of a depressing problem. "Our search for a new world is ended!"

"It's a horrible thought," shuddered Alora, gazing around at the ruins. "That this once-great civilization was destroyed—mercilessly. In a way, we'll be revenging these people—"

"Need I remind you gentlemen,"

interposed Angus Maccluff mildly, "that we have yet to reach our ship? Earth will never hear of this world from us, I'm afraid!"

FOSTAR tried his radio again, realizing that now, more than ever, it was vital for them to reach the ship and return to Earth. "Fostar calling Marten Crodell. Fostar cal—"

And then, over the quiet hiss of the tiny receiver, a voice interrupted. "Marten Crodell answering. I've been trying to contact you. Why have you been gone so long? Is Alora safe?" His tones were anxious.

"We're lost and in trouble!" Fostar went on in clipped phrases, giving their story.

"That explains these green beings watching the ship!" said the landowner. He went on slowly, half hesitantly. "I had told myself I would neither hinder nor help you, Rolan Fostar, since I've been in your ship!"

Fostar gasped. They were the words of a cold, practical man, one who had all his life believed himself fanatically right. How incredible his attitude seemed now, under the light of an alien sun, perhaps even to himself! There was a strange, thoughtful undertone of doubt in his tones, as though he had been thinking deeply while they had been gone.

"However, under the circumstances," Marten Crodell went on, "I'm with you! My daughter is in danger. I can't fly the ship to Earth alone. And we are facing a common enemy—if not a common cause. I'll help, Fostar, in whatever way I can!"

"All right!" snapped Fostar. "You know something of the ship's controls. Start the rocket-motor, let it idle. We'll get our bearings from

the sound. When we get near the ship, be ready with a rifle to cover us. Start the motor now."

They waited tensely. A minute later, a steady low rumble sounded over the quiet of the dead city. "Let's go!" cried Foster, facing the direction from which it came.

"And I think we'd better hurry!" remarked Angus MacLuff. "That green beggar you were talking to slipped away while we weren't looking. He'll have his companions after us before long!"

And so it proved. Pattering feet sounded behind them as they hurried through the demolished city. But now, at least, they knew their goal. At a flying pace, they managed to keep well ahead of the pursuers.

"If only we aren't cut off!" panted Foster.

It seemed they would be at the next intersection, but the group facing them was small. Their gun-blasts cleared the way. Again, further, a flanking group of the enemy appeared, but too late to intercept the flying Earth-people.

His gun hot and smoking in his hand, Foster laughed grimly. As fighters and strategists, the green plant-men were clumsily incompetent. Degenerate, ineffective, they certainly were. Mankind would have little trouble eliminating them—thus avenging the race murder of the original, human-like inhabitants.

Finally, the panting Earth-people saw their ship, near now, glinting brightly in the sunlight. Dr. Bronzun gave a hoarse shout of relief, then stumbled, falling back. Angus MacLuff flung a brawny arm around his waist and hurried him on. Foster slipped Alora's arm into his and pulled her along, to keep up their speed.

They reached the edge of the ruins.

As they ran into the clearing beyond, a group of the aliens stood between them and the ship. A withering blast from the Earth-people's guns failed to disperse them. Bullets hummed back.

Then, from the lock of the ship sounded the barking hiss of a blast-rifle. Marten Crodell stood there, pumping away methodically, raking the aliens from the back.

Under this double deluge of death, the remaining plant-men broke. They scattered, in utter rout. The way was clear!

Exhausted, the four stumbled into the ship. Marten Crodell closed the lock, shutting out the menace of the plant-people.

FOSTAR sat at the controls, a month later, watching the sun—their sun—slowly expand in the void. Their argosy among the stars was over. Thinking back, the last six months of orthodox time seemed crowded with a lifetime of incredible events. It had been like a fantastic dream, sometimes nightmarish, sometimes too starkly realistic. Mankind doomed—mankind saved! And he had been an instrument of destiny!

When they had come within the confines of the Solar System, and Foster had slowed their superpace to less than light-speed, he tuned the radio for news from their home world.

After a while, a message repeated in a variety of ways blared forth.

"Dr. Bronzun's theory of doom is now believed corroborated! The observatories of Oberon, Titan and Io report a decrease in the cosmic rays. Space-time is thinning. Earth and the whole Solar System are careening to the Edge of Space! And out there lies—annihilation!"

"At last—they realize it!" cried

Dr. Bronzun. He exchanged quiet glances of triumph with Angus Maccluff and Foster.

But Foster and Alora were watching Marten Crodell. They saw the swift, unbelieving shock that spread over his face. Stunned, he stared out into space—out toward the Beyond. His body shook.

Foster pitied him. The land-owner was seeing his lifelong empire of money and land crumbling about his head. He, more than any one else in the Solar System, felt the doom as a personal blow. It was not till an hour later that he turned, facing them.

"I was wrong," he said simply. "And you were right!" He squared his angular shoulders. "Come, let us tell them of the new world!"

A YEAR later, at Yorkopolis' greatest space-port, the five again stood together. Television apparatus hummed busily, recording a memorable event. Dr. Bronzun and Marten Crodell stood shaking hands, as a commentator spoke to the millions listening in.

"These two men, people of earth, have done great service to humanity, but will do infinitely more. Dr. Bronzun is in charge of the Great Migration. Marten Crodell, formerly our greatest interplanetary organizer, will be his first assistant. To the side you see Rolan Foster, chief pilot in charge of the transport fleet. Alora Crodell, with him, is to become his bride, in the first marriage on the new world! Angus Maccluff, chief engineer of the fleet, will be their best man. And today, they lead us to our new Earth!"

Ceremonies over, the party stepped within the huge, trim ship nearby, and a moment later it took off. With a roaring crescendo, ship after ship

followed, carrying the first of humanity—save for the previous military expeditions—to their new home far out in the void. The long line of the ferry fleet spiraled off into space. . . .

Within the officers' cabin of the flagship, Foster ordered the auxiliary pilot room to take over, then sneaked a kiss from Alora. Dr. Bronzun and Marten Crodell pretended to be interested in the wall charts.

"Marriage is a dangerous thing!" said Angus Maccluff dolefully. "I'm afraid you two will be very unhappy!"

"You old fraud!" accused Alora, wrinkling her nose at him. "You know you mean just the opposite!"

EPILOGUE

TWENTY years later, Yorkopolis lay quiet and empty, as were all the other cities and habitations of man, borne by the deserted Earth toward destruction. Queerly, however, some few hundreds of people kept vigil, having refused to leave Earth, unable to bear the thought of taking up life on a new world.

Suddenly Manhattan Island lifted itself into the sky and floated gently oceanward. The ocean became as smooth as glass, as natural laws reversed themselves inexplicably, with thinning space-time. The sun shed down an eerie green light, and under it grass grew a mile high at elevator speed. These were the beginnings of chaos. . . .

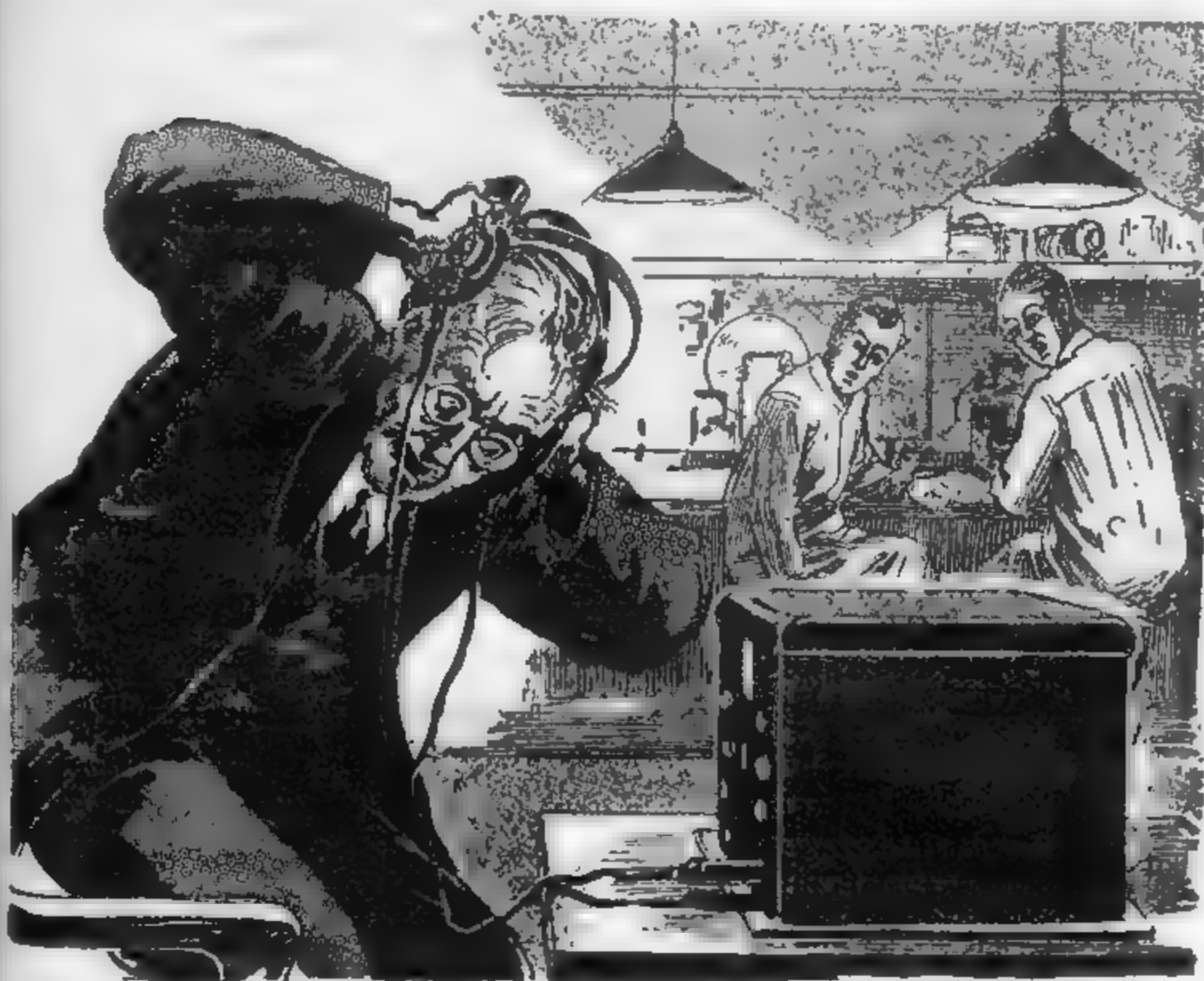
But humanity lived on in a new world, under a new sun, safe from the doom.



SHORT-WAVE MADNESS

by ROBERT CASTLE

Are there any limits to the progress of mankind? Are there any secrets that are forever forbidden to the minds of this world? Dr Gorrell finds a horrible affirmative in the realm beyond space!



"It knows I'm listening!" Gorrell screamed hoarsely. It's going to—"

TWO of us saw the end of Doctor Gorrell's great experiment, that night. Arthur Ransome and I, Jim Ray, had come very quickly in answer to the physicist's cryptic telegram, for we had been his favorite pupils in university days, and knew that for ten years he had been engaged upon some great and secret work. Now we stood in his lamplit

laboratory, gazing blankly at the result of his ten years' toil.

It was a machine, a cubical mechanism mounted on a heavy table. Its square metal sides shielded incalculable complexities of vacuum tubes, transformers and condensers. There was a row of six shining vernier dials on its front, and an instrument that looked like a pair of unusually bulky

headphones was plugged into a jack there.

Doctor Gorrel stood beside us, contemplating this metal child of his creation with deep pride in his aging face and faded blue eyes.

"I still don't understand," faltered Arthur finally. "Surely, doctor, you're not entirely serious in your assertion!"

"A machine that lets you listen in to the thoughts of other minds?" I said incredulously. "Really, doctor, even though I've always had the utmost respect for your achievements, I can't—"

"Don't be a blockhead, James," Gorrel admonished me. "The reason I chose you two, of all my former pupils, to help me tonight is because you don't have the blindly skeptical viewpoint of so many of my fellow scientists. There is nothing supernatural about this machine.

"Thought itself is an electrical impulse, a delicate electrical wave generated by the atoms of the brain. Then why can't a supersensitive receiver pick up those electrical thought-impulses at a distance? And this receiver is supersensitive—it makes the most sensitive radio look like a crude toy."

"But even if your receiver can pick up the electrical thought-impulses of other brains," I objected, "I don't see how it can reproduce them in your own brain."

"Nor I," added, Arthur, his clean-cut blond face frowning in troubled incredulity.

"It's simple enough," shrugged Gorrel. "The impulses received are amplified greatly in the coils of those headphones. By electrical induction, they set up similar impulses in the brain of whoever wears the headphones, so that the wearer experi-

ences the exact thoughts he has tuned in."

"But I don't have to lecture you about the receiver when you're going to hear for yourselves," he continued impatiently.

Gorrel put on the headphones of the astonishing instrument and then touched switches and twisted rheostat knobs. Transformers and tubes began to hum inside the thing. Arthur and I watched, still half incredulous but with fascinated interest.

Doctor Gorrel was muttering to us as he slowly twisted the fine vernier dials.

"All human thought-waves come within a narrow band of wavelengths. Have to stay inside that to hear human thoughts. But you can pick out different minds by infinitely fine changes of wavelength—each brain has its own frequency."

He stopped tinkering with the dials, listened, and chuckled dryly. Then he took off the headphones and handed them to me.

"There's a mind for you to listen to."

GINGERLY, Arthur and I each held one of the bulky ear-pieces to our heads. And then with a rush, new, strange thoughts began streaming through my mind.

"—Have to get to work earlier tomorrow. Boss might fire me, at that. Wonder if I could get that roadster any cheaper? Yes, Mr. Wilson, I intend to check those figures now. That little shrimp Wilson! I'd like to—"

Almost awe-struck, we took off the headphones and looked at Gorrel. I asked him a stunned question.

"That's really the thoughts, the stream of consciousness of a human mind? Whose mind is it?"

"Lord, I don't know," Gorrel shrugged. "I can tune in different

minds, but I've no way of telling how far away they are. It's probably some day-dreaming bookkeeper."

"Wait until I let you hear some others," he added, bending again to make fine shifts of the shining dials.

The minds we listened in on in the next hour! The fascination of that listening, of hearing the whole conscious thoughts of one person after another!

Thoughts tragic, comic, pitiful, absurd, crazy, all paraded through our minds as Gorrel tuned in mind after mind. Thoughts from men and women and children in almost every land on earth, streaming through our own brains.

"I'll kill Rosita if she looks at Morales again! My knife between her shoulder-blades—God, I don't want to do it, but I won't let that pig get her—"

"Five hundred francs more and I can buy that little Montmartre shop. If I could just save more—"

"Eleven more hours and they'll be hanging me! People outside will be laughing and loving while they're putting the rope around my neck!"

"Dear Christ, let it be red, let it be red! That's my last lira on the wheel and—it's black!"

I was dazed, confused by this wild babble of a hundred different minds, and so was Arthur when Gorrel finally stood up from the tuning dials.

"We've listened to minds all over the earth," Arthur whispered. "Good Lord, doctor, the potentialities of a thing like that!"

"It would be better if you'd never made it," I said sharply. Realization of the terrific possibilities for evil in the thing had come to me. "If that machine should get into the wrong hands—"

"It won't," said Gorrel impatiently. "This that you've heard—it isn't even the real purpose of the machine. The real purpose is to hear minds outside the earth, unhuman minds of other worlds."

"The machine can do it," he said as he saw our stupefied expressions. "Its supersensitive mechanism can pick up and amplify the thought-waves of minds on worlds far across the galaxy from our planet. That's why I called you two here tonight! I want you, who are astronomers, to listen to some of those minds of other worlds."

Arthur Ransome and I could only stare dumfoundedly as Gorrel bent again to the gleaming vernier dials of his incredible machine. The thing he proposed seemed so stunningly impossible that we could make no comment, yet Gorrel was as completely confident as ever.

"Non-human brains emit their electrical thought-impulses in different wave lengths than the human brain," he was muttering. "Each type of mind operates in a different band—ah, listen to this."

Dumbly, again sharing the headphones, Arthur and I listened to the thoughts picked up by the machine.

"—They will come again, invading our depths. Why don't we take the offensive, invade the land in our water-suits, crush them by a sudden attack? If only the Elders would listen to me—"

"Some sort of intelligent water-life," whispered Arthur, staring at us as we heard that weird, alien flow of thoughts. "Sea-dwelling creatures, on some distant world—"

John Gorrel's lined face was eager. "You see the importance of the thing? With it, we can learn more about the rest of the universe than men have dreamed possible."

WE PROBED secrets of far stars and worlds in the next hours, Gorrel and Arthur and I. I cannot remember now all that we heard, the minds on myriad distant

worlds that we listened to through that marvelous receiver.

We heard the thoughts of creatures dwelling upon icy planets and fighting back the onset of the bitter cold, falling and dying in despair. We listened to the raging minds of unhuman flying creatures, swooping down on a defenseless city. We heard the savage, superstitiously fearful thoughts of other creatures sacrificing some of their number to appease their ominously reddening sun.

Minds of every degree and kind, some so low in the scale of intelligence that it was like listening to the brains of beasts, others so high above us that we could not comprehend the super-scientific things that engrossed their thoughts; minds, some so nearly human we recognized all the familiar emotions of love and hate and fear, others so utterly alien and icy that we could not understand their thinking.

Arthur and I were beyond wonder, when Gorrel finally said, "It's enough for tonight. We're all fagged, and no wonder."

But as he moved to switch the thing off, his hand paused.

"I wonder if there's anything on that extremely low wave-length region?" he said absently. "I've never tried it yet."

As though intrigued by the idea, he twisted the vernier dials quickly, adjusting the headphones on his own ears. Arthur and I had sunk exhaustedly into chairs.

"Apparently no mind emits waves of so low—" Gorrel was saying as he twisted the dials, when he was suddenly silent.

Upon his face there fell a frozen awe so terrible and heart-checking to see that both of us bounded to our feet. His faded blue eyes were supernaturally dilated.

"Good God!" he whispered. "There is a mind in that low wave-length band — a tremendous mind. Its thoughts—stupendous—"

Arthur suddenly pointed in wild excitement at the vernier dials as he read their position.

"Gorrel" he cried. "That wave you're listening to—"

But Gorrell commanded silence with a fiercely upraised hand. The physicist's lined face was white as a sheet and his whole body was trembling.

"A colossal brain, somewhere in space, and I'm listening to it," he whispered hoarsely. "It's power and intelligence—vast beyond belief. A super-brain, talking by thought to other super-brains somewhere—"

"Now I understand!" he cried suddenly. "God, the incredibility of it all! This super-brain in space—I know what it is now! And I'm listening to its thoughts, secrets—"

"It knows I'm listening!" Gorrell screamed hoarsely all of a sudden. "It's going to—"

His hands clawed wildly to get the headphones off. Before he could remove them, under the petrified gaze of Arthur and myself, the thing happened.

John Gorrel froze rigid in the midst of his wild attempts, his eyes bulging, as though he listened to a powerful, all-compelling voice. Then stiffly, apparently in answer to irresistible command, he turned mechanically toward the receiver.

He raised it in his hands from its table—and dashed it upon the floor. It shattered into a wreck of broken tubes and torn wiring. And the next moment, Gorrel himself sank lifeless beside the wreck of his great creation.

I stumbled to his side and tried

wildly to revive him. But a moment showed me the uselessness of it.

"Arthur, he's dead!" I cried.

"Yes, of course he is," Arthur said numbly. He was staring with wide, haunted eyes at the wrecked receiver. "Gorrel listened to a colossal mind, a super-brain of space that didn't want him eavesdropping on it, and that ordered him to destroy the receiver and then die."

"A super-brain of space?" I exclaimed. "But what—where—"

ARTHUR stumbled to a window, flung it open and pointed up with a trembling hand at the starry sky.

"It's up there!" he cried, and as he saw by my dazed stare that I did not understand, he added fiercely,

"Didn't you see that the last wave-length Gorrel listened to, the thought-waves of the super-brain, was exactly .001 Angstroms? The exact wave-length of cosmic rays!"

"Cosmic rays?" I cried. "Then cosmic rays are really the thought-waves of the super-brain? But they can't be—it's been proved that cosmic rays emanate from the stars of our galaxy."

"They do!" Arthur cried. "But the stars are only atoms in larger space, and in that larger space the star-atoms could combine to form living matter, thinking matter, couldn't they?"

"Our galaxy, a mass of star-atoms gathered together into living, thinking matter—our galaxy is the super-brain!"

MORE STORIES

The Editors of this magazine believe that you bought it because you want to read a bunch of good science fiction stories — so we have devoted almost the entire magazine to fiction. In the belief that a publication of this type should remain in its own field and not encroach upon the purely scientific journals, you will note that the occasional articles appearing herein have a direct bearing on science fiction. We would like to hear from our readers regarding our omission of space-filling scientific articles and departments. Our platform: more adventure—more entertainment—more stories in

SCIENCE FICTION

WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

Science fiction fans in the New York area are organizing a World Science Fiction Convention to be held in conjunction with the New York World's Fair, during the first week of July. Convention committee members have been busy with propaganda for several months and are assured of attendance to the Convention by science fiction fans, authors and editors from all parts of the United States—also from England, Canada and Mexico. If you want information about the World Science Fiction Convention, which is to be the greatest concentration of science-fiction talent and fandom ever held, send a 3c stamp to Sam Moskowitz, 603 S. 11th St., Newark, N. J.

ESPERANTO---

Tongue of Tomorrow

by CHARLES D. HORNIG

SCIENCE-FICTION, as a literature, deals primarily with the future. It is called science-fiction, because human progress can come only through the future developments and mechanical improvements of the world of science. Our civilization has built itself up by means of scientific invention and discovery, and, from all indications, will continue to expand in a like manner for an indefinite future period.

Our machine world of today has brought forth many great and efficient means of transportation and communication. It is now a comparatively simple matter for anyone to travel extensively throughout the world. A man can now get into touch with almost anyone in the world via telegram, cablegram, or telephone in a matter of minutes—a miracle of our civilization.

It is easy to see that these marvelous systems of communications and travel have a tendency to unify the world — to create binding ties of friendship between millions of persons, who would otherwise be hopelessly out of touch with one another.

A very annoying hindrance to social progress and peace among the nations of the world today is the lack of a feasible international language. In ancient times, when communities were isolated from each other, each group of people developed its own local tongue. Had all the world's populace been constantly intermingling, as they are today, it is only

logical to suppose that there would automatically arise one dominant language. Today, there is a definite need for such a language, for the machine age has forever banished isolation of nations. But language has not kept pace with human progress, and a person must spend many laborious years learning many languages, if he is to make a successful and profitable tour of the world.

It is also true that there is more peace between nations that "speak the same language." A man feels a greater human bond between himself and someone he can understand, than he does with a person whose tongue is alien. An international language would tend to greatly lessen the prospects of war, to make the world into "one great, big happy family."

However, the international language should not attempt to eliminate all other tongues — it would merely act as an auxiliary. You could talk to your neighbor in your native tongue—and with the other language, speak to the entire world!

OVER a half-century ago, an Austrian by the name of Lazarus Ludovic Zamenhof realized the growing necessity of a world-wide auxiliary speech. He had a masterful knowledge of all the world's civilized tongues, and by using the best qualities of each, he developed a perfect hybrid—Esperanto!

Today, Esperanto is spoken fluent-

ly by many millions of persons over the Earth, and is taught in thousands of classes. It is the most logical of all the proposed world tongues because of its simplicity, thoroughness, and fluency. Esperanto can be learned in one-twentieth the time it takes to learn any other Latin language. There is a comparatively short vocabulary, but every shade of meaning can be derived by the use of a few simple prefixes and suffixes. Instead of having to learn two words to express "hot" and "cold," for instance, we express both meanings by the use of one root word, a suffix meaning "to a great degree" and a prefix denoting "opposite."

One great virtue of Esperanto that also makes it simple to learn is the complete lack of exceptions to rules, and completely phonetic spelling. All simple adjectives end with the letter "a," nouns with "o," adverbs with "e," etc. Plurals terminate with the letter "j" (pronounced as the English "y").

A great many words in Esperanto are the same or very similar to English words. This same applies to all other popular languages — they all find much in common with Esperanto. The National Secretary of the Universal Esperanto Association, Buffalo, New York, has prepared the following short paragraph in Esperanto. See how much of it you can understand:

"*Inteligenta persono lernas la lingvon rapide kaj facile. Esperanto estas la moderna, kultura lingvo de la tuta mondo. Simpla, fleksebla, praktika solvo de la problemo de internacia kompreno. Esperanto meritas vian seriozan konsideron.*"

The National Secretary also says:

"Knowledge of a second language is a valuable cultural asset. Just as a national language brings you in

more intimate contact with the country where that particular tongue is spoken, so Esperanto, the international language, makes you a 'citizen of the world'—more cosmopolitan than even an accomplished linguist!"

A large amount of the world's best literature has been printed in Esperanto, and there are many regular publications in this tongue.

At a meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva, a manifesto addressed to the teaching profession was signed by the world's leading educators, and contains the following paragraph:

"We find that Esperanto is entirely adequate for practical use as an international language for all purposes, and that, moreover, it possesses remarkable qualities as an educational instrument. We cordially recommend you to encourage the teaching of Esperanto, not only because of its utility in commerce, science and other international activities, but also because of its value as a stimulus to friendly relationship between the peoples of the world. Esperanto should be made a part of the educational program of every civilized country."

RECENTLY, the first European radio hookup was accomplished by the use of Esperanto. The language has reached great heights on the old continent.

The most active Esperanto clubs in the United States are located in New York and Los Angeles. Last summer, the Esperanto Convention took place in Cleveland, Ohio. There was also a European tour that left New York for many foreign ports, where American Esperantists were met by their multitudinous "samideanoj" throughout the old world.

Esperanto, to all indications, is truly the "tongue of tomorrow."

MOON HEAVEN

by DOM PASSANTE

A meteor disables a small ship of the void, and Brig Dean is forced to land his party on a wild, unexplored satellite! But their safety seems assured—until the primeval inhabitants begin to resent the presence of Earthmen!



He vaulted with all his strength.

TWO pairs of worried eyes stared apprehensively at the fuel gage; it was nearly down to zero. The giant rocket exhausts gasped and choked noisily over a fast-diminishing supply of explosive.

"It's that meteor bumping we got coming through the asteroid belt," panted Brig Dean, crack American space pilot, as he swung around from the control board. "I felt her jolt, but I never figured she'd had a crack on the jets. The power's leaking. . . ."

"Well, don't stand there talking like a textbook!" wailed Cynthia

Fowlie, flapping helplessly up and down in a sheath of green silk. "We're going to crash! Oh, why did I ever become engaged to an American spaceman? Why didn't I stop in London? Look—look! What's that?"

Her bejeweled white hand pointed through the window and her vivid blue eyes opened wide in alarmed surprise. She was a beautiful woman, and knew it; what she didn't know was that she was vain and exceedingly selfish. . . .

Brig swung around with tight lips.

His gray eyes were bright and hard.

"That's Jupiter," he growled; "and it makes it plenty bad, too. We can't escape his gravitational field with this leak. Our only course is to land on one of his moons—if we're lucky!"

"One of the moons!" Cynthia cried in horror. "But—but, Brig, what about my visiting father at the Uranian settlement? That's what we came on this journey for, wasn't it? To go to Uranus and get married?"

"Have to wait," Brig said briefly. He clamped strong hands down on the rocket controls. His eyes studied the whirling moons of Jupiter—Ganymede, Io, Europa, and Callisto. The other five didn't count; they were only derelict rocks, anyway.

"I guess Io's about the nearest," he muttered presently, and giving a lateral blast to the vessel, he swung it rather laboringly away from Jove's titanic field.

"It's our only chance," he went on. "We'll have to ditch for the time being and wait until a regular line vessel passes this way. Won't be more than a fortnight. . . ."

CYNTHIA stared at the back of of his black head for a moment, pushed aside an aluminum-colored lock of hair from her white forehead. Awkwardly, due to the ship's lurching, she went over to the figure lounging in the swinging armchair.

"Monty, what do we do?" she entreated, spreading her arms. "What do we do? We just can't land on this nasty old Jovian moon. Think of the wreck I'll look if we have to stay very long . . . I Me, the best-dressed woman in England."

The lounging figure, potential best man at the Uranian wedding, disentangled himself. Immaculately clad limbs took their right positions.

Lemon-haired Lord Montgomery Stinson, chinless blue-eyed cousin of Cynthia, stood up—then promptly sat down again as Brig hurtled the spluttering vessel around in a curving arc.

"After all, Cyn, there isn't so deuced much I can do," he complained, wincing visibly at the sinking sensation in his stomach. "I mean to say, I don't dashed well understand how to run these confounded space things, anyhow. Come to think of it, it serves you right. If you'd taken an ordinary vessel—"

"And engaged to Brig Dean, crack space pilot!" Cynthia exclaimed, ashy pale with space-strain. "I couldn't do that, Monty. Besides, on an ordinary liner, I'd have to mix with the common rabble. Naturally, that's impossible!"

Monty stared around the control cabin uneasily; finally he looked at Brig's broad, hunched shoulders.

"I say, old fellow, did you say Io?"

"Yeah," Brig twisted momentarily. "Better swing onto something. We'll land in a minute—and pretty forcibly, I'm afraid. Our forward jets are dead. . . ." He broke off and yelled, "Betts! Betts! Come here!"

A momentary silence as the ship hurtled towards the brilliantly gleaming Jovian moon—then a portly figure of medium height, attired rather incongruously in a morning suit, silently entered from the kitchen region of the vessel.

"Yes, sir?"

"Betts, we're going to land. In case of any mishaps, I want you to stand by and help me get all the valuables off the ship."

"Very good, sir. Io, I believe?"

"Right! Know anything about it?"

Betts' three chins quivered momentarily in pent-up pleasure. His pale blue eyes became earnest.

"Quite a deal, Mr. Dean, if I may be permitted. I understand it is an outpost planet, useless as a trading center, therein differing from Ganymede, Callisto and Europa, which are, of course, both trading and refueling centers. Io, I understand, turns one face to the primary, Jupiter, with the result that Io has been drawn into valley form on the side opposite Jupiter. In this valley, according to the tests of Murchinson and Snedley, sir—expedition in 2112, I believe—is a breathable atmosphere, ceasing at a height of five hundred feet and there becoming pure vacuo. . . ."

"Nice going, Betts," Brig murmured, tense eyes fixed on the flying moon.

"Thank you, sir. There are other things. Io's gravity is a third of Earth's, and her solar revolution is forty-two hours or thereabouts. . . . Forgive me, sir. My interest in the moons of Jove rather carries me away at times."

"That's beastly clever of you, Betts," observed Monty, in wonderment. "Funny! To think my manservant knows all that!"

Betts turned deferentially. "The other details are none too clear, my lord. I understand that one Captain Rutter and his wife crashed here some twenty years ago and were never found. Subsequent explorers have found little on Io to commend it. It is a desert island of space, if I have your lordship's permission to use the phrase—"

"Get ready!" Brig interrupted curtly; and simultaneously the ship darted into what little atmosphere the non-Jovian side of the satellite possessed.

Brig stared below. The ship was leveling over a deep, fertile, jungle-infested valley, bathed in the triple

lights of Europa, Ganymede, and the distant disk-like Sun. The valley—drawn thus by the terrific pull of the primary—occupied an approximate half of Io, bounded on all sides by black, cruel mountains which skirted a vast rocky plateau bathed in the sullen green light of Jupiter himself.

There was no time to observe more. Brig held his breath as the vessel plunged into the midst of the valley, landed with a crash that tore down trees, creepers and plants in the rush. . . . There was a violent jolt and a long soggy thud—then the ship began to tremble and started sinking gradually.

BRIG glanced out of the window. "A swamp! We're sinking! Outside—quick!"

He picked the fallen, gasping Cynthia from the floor with consummate ease; she weighed very little in the third-normal gravity. Betts, his cumbersome body comfortable for once, was spinning the airlock screws. Monty rose up and uneasily adjusted rimless glasses.

"Sinking?" he repeated helplessly. "Oh, dear!"

Brig, all action, ignored him. He began snatching at all the light valuables he needed, crammed them into his pockets, his shirt, everywhere he could.

"Step on it, will you!" he yelled, as Monty and the girl looked dubiously outside on a steamy expanse of jungle. "Betts, give them a hand."

"With pleasure, sir."

He stepped outside and tested the ground and jumped back immediately. It was pure bog—nearly ordinary water. Dubiously, he studied the ground beyond; there it seemed to have solidity.

"Here, I'll try it," Brig said, look-

ing with him. "Don't come until I tell you."

He stepped back a little, hugged his various valuables, then vaulted with all his strength. He cleared the bog with ease in the slight attraction, landed in lushy but quite supportable loam.

"O. K.!" he yelled. "Come on!"

There was a stir in the lopsided airlock. Cynthia flew towards him like five-foot-six of green ribbon. He caught her, set her down. . . . His Lordship dropped short and fell knee deep, floundered out with ruined trousers and revolted face. Betts was last, bearing in his arms the portable electrical equipment.

"It occurred to me, sir, we might need it—for signaling," he explained ambiguously, as he landed.

"Huh?" Brig puzzled; then he shrugged. "Mebbe. You'd better come back with me. We've got to grab portable tents, space-suits, and several things before the ship sinks. Let's go."

"Delighted, sir."

Time and again they vaulted back and forth over the morass, accomplishing leaps that would have been farcical on Earth. . . . Little by little they brought everything portable they could find; the slight attraction made heavy objects simple to carry—but at last it was no longer safe to venture. The vessel gave a heavy lurch, settled down, vanished in a slowly closing eddy of ocher bubbles.

"It would appear to have sunk, sir," Betts commented sadly, flattening back his thinning hair. "Most deplorable, if I may say so . . ."

Brig shrugged helplessly. "Eighty thousand dollars at the bottom of a morass. Thank Heaven it was a service machine and not backed by my own money."

"Have you got that much?" asked

Monty affably. "Dash it, I thought you were marrying Cyn because you were broke—"

"Monty—you idiot!" she flamed, turning on him. "You know perfectly well it's love at first sight. . . . And in front of your servant, too!"

"I assure you, my lord, that your confidence will be respected," Betts murmured calmly.

"Considering we're the only people on this hell-fired moon, that's no news," Brig grunted. "As for my financial status, I am broke. So what? The market crash two years back saw to that. . . . I'll start over again somehow— But come on, let's get moving. We've got these tents to fix. Betts, you fix the props."

Betts moved with his new-found celerity. Cynthia flapped her white arms helplessly.

"But work, Brig, in this heat!" she protested, fanning herself. "After all, there are certain things a woman of position must remember, even here. Poise, deportment, and dignity. Suppose—suppose my makeup were to become smeared?" she wound up in horror.

"It probably will," Brig assured her laconically, pegging down the tent poles as Betts held them. "Temperature here is far over a hundred degrees; makes Central Africa feel like an ice-box. It's solar heat and Io's internal warmth that's responsible. The rest of Io will be void-cold. Jupiter's no use for heat. . . ."

Monty tore off his coat impatiently, laid it reverently with the rest of the equipment.

"May as well help, I suppose," he grumbled; "but I regard it as a damned insult. A slur on the traditions of the Stinsons. Ducal halls—and things."

"Forget your ducal halls and grab this rope," Brig grunted. "Cyn, hold

this canvas— That's it. Now we're going places."

CHAPTER II

IN TWO hours a makeshift camp had been erected, split up into sleeping quarters, cooking tent, general and dining tent. Betts came to the rescue with a meal from tins warmed over the electric heater.

During this period, the lights shifted somewhat. Ganymede had set, but Callisto had risen. The Sun had not changed position very much. Since Io takes 42 hours to revolve, its solar day is roughly twice as long as an Earthly one.

After the meal, Brig went to the tent door and looked around him. The jungle seemed peculiarly silent—a jungle made up of trees and plants totally foreign to his spatial knowledge. It had about it a certain odd, attractive beauty. Its principal trees were feathery, palmlike creations, bolstered around their boles with thick, vividly-hued verdure.

Struck with a sudden thought, he turned back into the tent, regarded Betts as he removed the remains of the meal.

"Betts, I believe you said something about a signal? What were you driving at?"

"Well, sir, it occurred to me that on the Jovian side of this moon there will probably be carbon. If we could obtain two sticks or pencils of the substance, fix them in our electric equipment, and break the electric current at the points of the carbon, we would have an extremely brilliant signal—in truth a carbon arc. No ship could fail to observe it."

Brig nodded slowly. "You've got something there, Betts. . . . Seems

to me you're something of a scientist."

Betts smiled humbly. "Forgive my saying so, sir, but the well trained servant is the master of many vocations. . . . I would like to add, I would be willing to accompany you to the plateau in search of carbon."

"So you shall, when we've had a night's rest. In the meantime I don't think it would be a bad idea to see what sort of a jungle we're in. How about an expedition?"

"Too hot," groaned Monty. "The work with the tents has left me a mess of bally nerves."

"I'll come," Cynthia volunteered, rising languidly. "I may be able to find something to use for make-up. My compact went down with the ship."

Brig shrugged, turned to Betts. "You'd better come too. We don't know what we may find and the more there are of us—"

"Exactly, sir. Ray guns, of course?"

"Yes, right away."

"I might as well come," Monty broke in, rising hurriedly. "I wish you didn't have to be so energetic, though. . . ."

Brig didn't answer him. Betts reappeared in the tent with four ray guns and the party moved out into the clearing, entered the jungle's steamy, lacy folds.

Monty grumbled perpetually; Cynthia floundered on high heels and bewailed the rents that were being torn in her silken gown.

"You ought to wear shorts," Brig remarked dryly. "There are some in the clothing equipment back at the tent. And flat shoes."

"Shorts!" she echoed, horrified. "Me? Good Lord, do you think I'm

a common woman pilot, or something?"

"No, but this is 2130 and it's time you behaved with sense," Brig growled. "I can't make you out, Cyn; our landing here has shown me lots of things I'd never have thought were possible in your make-up—"

"Because you're a penniless space pilot, a space trotter who's always looking for a perfect place to live, doesn't give you the right to insult me!" she said hotly. "Sometimes I wonder what I ever saw in you to—"

"Oh, skip it," Brig sighed wearily. "Come on."

He turned to advance, but Cynthia stopped suddenly and looked up in surprise. "What's that?" she whispered.

The others looked above. Brig stared in wonderment at something quivering in the tree branch just over their heads—then suddenly Betts hurtled forward, clutched the girl around the waist in a flying tackle, and bore her to the ground.

Instantly the others fell back, stared in frozen horror at a snake-like object that had abruptly hurtled forward with bullet swiftness and imbedded itself in the tree beside them. It quivered spasmodically, died from the sheer impact of collision.

Brig stared at it in horror. It was a pure ropy organism, bounded with incredibly powerful muscles.

Betts floundered to his feet and dragged the gasping Cynthia up beside him.

"Pardon my roughness, miss," he apologized. "That object is an Ionian impaler, or more technically, *impalia diaboli*. It usually kills its prey by behaving like a living javelin—buries its head inside its prey and kills it, absorbing nourishment at the same time. A flesh eater, obviously.

If it misses. . . ." He glanced significantly at the dead organism.

"Thank God you recognized it in time," Brig whispered. "How'd you ever come to know about it?"

"Quite simple, sir. I have read the copious notes of Murchinson and Snedley, wherein it is mentioned. There are other things. . . . Really, sir, it interests me immensely. Shall we proceed?"

"I'm not too sure," muttered Monty. "Suppose another of these things attacks us?"

"If we keep alert, my lord, we can always dodge them."

"Let's go," Brig said, taking Cynthia's arm.

THEY resumed their progress, hardly realizing how subtly their positions had reversed. Betts, though still a servant in essence, had in truth become the leader of the party. His unexpected knowledge of things Ionian had elevated him considerably.

The fantastic wonder of the place held the party silent, for the most part. They were accustomed by now to the intense, cloying heat and lighter gravity—but what they were not used to was the constant shift of lights as the moons went across the sky, outstripping the slower-moving Sun. Everything had three shadows, the constant changing of which formed sinister patterns at times.

"I say, just a minute!" Monty exclaimed, stopping. "What's this?"

He came forward from the rear, holding up a corroded object with an inlaid pearl handle. Most of the pearl had fallen away; the whole thing was near to collapsing in rust—but what was left of it was plainly distinguishable as a hunting knife.

"Where'd you find it?" Brig demanded, studying it.

"Back on the trail there; I kicked against it. Somebody's been here, what?"

"Yeah, but a mighty long time ago."

Betts hovered up, took it courteously—studied it.

"I believe it must have belonged to Captain and Mrs. Rutter," he said slowly. "You notice, my lord, it is the early type knife, in use twenty years ago. The later explorers did not use knives of this type—Murchinson and Snedley for instance. This trail, then, must once have been traversed by the long-dead Rutters."

He tossed the relic to the ground, dusted his plump fingers.

"So be it, then. I often wondered what happened to the Rutters. They—"

He broke off and turned at a sudden crackling of branches nearby. Immediately he and Brig whipped out their ray guns, then lowered them at the odd, fantastic little creature that hopped into the clearing.

It was perhaps eighteen inches tall, moving with the gait of a baby ape, its face astonishingly like that of a pathetic human child. As it advanced, it chattered and whimpered, began to clutch Brigg's leg imploringly.

"Well, old man, what's the matter?" He heaved it up and studied it, stroking it gently. It was clearly frightened.

Betts cleared his throat. "A baby manape, sir—a curious kind of hybrid, cross between man and ape with an almost human intellect. Rather treacherous when full grown, I believe."

"Let me have him!" Cynthia begged, cuddling the soft, hairy body

in her arms. "He's just too sweet! I'm going to make him my pet; I've so missed poor Pogo since we left Earth."

"Pogo?" Brig hazarded; then he remembered. "Oh, that Pekingese of yours!"

"Don't you think we'd better stagger back?" suggested Monty nervously. "I mean to say, apes and snakes and things. We might meet a dinosaur or something. . . ."

Brig nodded. "O.K., we'll go back. We've seen enough. . . ."

Turning, they began to retrace their steps. As they went, they could hear the strange sounds of the champagne flitters—or, in modern American, the "pop and bubble" birds—odd, fast moving specimens resembling storks, with a chirping note like the pulling of the cork and subsequent pouring of champagne.

In temperament they were akin to moths singeing their wings—but instead of seeking flame, the flitters chose to rise to the airless heights fringing the valley, there to commit suicide in the ghastly cold sweeping in from the little world's Jovian side.

ONCE they regained camp, the party retired, exhausted with the heat and their activities. Cynthia took her new-found pet to her tent with her, doting over it with almost sickly intensity. By the time she had finished fussing with it, the camp was quiet.

She turned and switched off the portable lamp; the lights of the moons and sinking sun moved slowly across the roughly canvased floor. Abruptly, she turned as the tent flap opened. Monty came in slowly, fully dressed in his mud-stained suit, cigarette smoking lazily between his lips.

"Y'known, Cyn, it's all very idi-

otic," he complained, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"What is?" She stared at him surprisedly in the twilight.

"Your marrying Brig—when we get to Uranus. What do you want to do it for? Hang it all, he's admitted he's no money—and I'm darn sure you don't love him. So, why do it? I'd marry you tomorrow if you'd have me."

"I know, Monty—but if I did that, I wouldn't have nearly so much money as I shall get if I marry Brig. You know, of course, that father's fortune is far larger than yours?"

"Of course, but—"

"Well, when father dies, I shall get the lot, providing I marry Brig, together with a handsome yearly allowance while he lives. Simple, isn't it? Dad dotes on Brig because he's the ace pilot of the spaceways, and since father is himself chief of that organization, I just can't help myself. . . . You do understand, Monty, don't you?"

"I suppose so. You don't love him, do you?"

"Who could? He's all brawn. . . . Not like you—"

Cynthia paused in mid-sentence and stared through the gauzy wall of the tent. Something was moving in the shifting lights. Monty stared with her, gulped audibly.

Then something came into fuller view, followed by others—stooping, shagging forms moving forward slowly, muttering and chanting strangely among themselves.

"Apes!" Cynthia screamed suddenly, clapping a hand to her mouth. "Monty! They're apes!"

He blinked stupidly, uncertain as to what to do—then, as the shambling figures came nearer, he jumped to his feet, intending to head for the interconnecting tent flap joining the

other. The lesser gravity tripped him up. By the time he was on his feet, Brig and Betts had appeared, drawn by the girl's cry.

"What's the matter, Cyn?" Brig strode over to her after a mere passing glance at Monty. Betts blocked the inter-flap.

"Apes!" she faltered. "L-look!"

"Manapes, miss," Betts corrected, gazing at them. "Unless I am very much mistaken, they are looking for this little lost one on the bed here. It may mean trouble if we don't give it back."

Brig studied the growing circle of creatures with worried eyes. They were surrounding the entire camp, evidently not only intent on rescuing their lost baby, but on exacting vengeance for his theft also.

Reaching backwards, Brig grabbed the little creature from the bed, flung the tent flap to one side and dropped the baby, whimpering, outside. There was a concerted rush towards it. He watched tensely.

"I ought not to have let you bring it," he muttered. "I might have known the parents and tribe would come after it—just like lions or tigers do. . . . Trouble is, these things are more brainy than lions and tigers. They might do anything."

BETTS disappeared through the inter-door. He returned with four ray guns and handed them around.

"I—I don't know how to use these things," Cynthia wailed, fingering it gingerly. "I didn't know how when we were in the jungle, either. Oh, Brig, I—"

"Shut up!" he hissed. "They'll hear you!"

He was right. With menacing care, the manapes, reinforced now

by others from the jungle, closed their circle towards the tents. Every detail of their subhuman faces and hairy bodies became distinctly visible in the changing lights.

"Get ready for a fight," Brig muttered, dropping to one knee to steady his intended aim. "Betts—Monty, down beside me. Cyn, stay on the bed. You may be safer. . . ."

She was crying now, frightened out of her wits. Monty fidgeted with his gun, swore limpidly.

Brig and Betts both tensed, their eyes bright and hard, guns ready as the packed creatures reached the gauzy tent wall; the sound of their labored breathing became distinctly audible—

Then something inexplicable happened. There was a brief sound, almost like the merry laugh of a woman, and it was followed almost immediately by a whirring, buzz-saw note like a horde of bees pouring from a hive. The pale light of the setting sun and the scurrying moons was dimmed by a sudden swirling bit of cloud. The buzzing grew louder. . . . The twilight dimmed to almost pitch darkness.

"Look, sir!" Betts whispered. "Millions of insects!"

Brig nodded helplessly and got to his feet. He stared out on the disorganized mob of manapes. They were writhing and twisting as though in the grip of something devastatingly ticklish. They were laughing! Actually laughing with uncannily human tones and the more they were smothered in the whirling cloud of zipping, darting insects, the more they laughed!

They doubled up in insane mirth. The clearing became a mass of hysterical pandemonium, male and female manapes alike rolling over and over on the ground, bellowing

until it seemed their lungs would burst.

"What in Heavens' name happened?" Brig gasped, astounded. "Betts, do you know?"

He slid swiftly to the outer flap and gently drew it aside. Instantly, he jerked back as a cloud of the insects came whizzing in like a multitude of wasps.

"Most careless of me, sir!" he panted. "I—I just wanted to make sure. They're laughing bugs, sir. . . ." He brushed them off frantically as they stung his face and hands. "Keep clear of them if you can—"

That was impossible. The things were everywhere. They smothered the screaming Cynthia in one solid cloud, left her gasping and gurgling with revolted horror; then they swept across to Monty and enveloped him—and quickly moved on to Brig.

He felt an extraordinary sensation surge through him; it felt like a dentist's laughing gas. . . . But this was no nitrous oxide; it was a sudden change in brain sensations. He was prompted by an ungovernable desire to laugh—laugh insanely, for no reason!

Betts' face merged up in the half-light like a kid's balloon, grinning from ear to ear.

"Hysteria termite, sir," he gasped out, fighting for control. "Harmless, but its sting poisons the blood stream—produces a spurious energy and needless merriment. I remember. . . . Murchinson and Snedley were bitten. Page six, sir, if I remember, of volume one. . . . Ha-ha! Pardon me! Io and Insects, sir. . . . Safe enough from manapes, sir, though I don't know how they came so conveniently. . . . Bugs, I mean. Ha-ha! Ha— Pardon me!"

With a gulp, Betts floundered outside into the clearing, unable to control himself any longer. He mingled with the manapes, but like him, they were too convulsed with laughter to attack him. He was laughing, peal upon peal. He blundered out of Brig's sight.

Brig swung round, still holding onto the threads of control. He went across to the hysterically giggling Cynthia and caught her slim shoulders tightly.

"Cyn, shut up!" he shouted hoarsely. "Control yourself; You've been bitten by— Cyn, please!"

She only yelled he louder, tears streaming down her cheeks. He shook her until the hair tumbled in front of her face; he struck her sharply across both cheeks, but it made no difference. Finally he left her coiled up in paroxysms of merriment.

It was the same with Monty. He lay on the floor, rolling over and over, breathless with hysteria. . . . Brig breathed hard, felt himself slipping. The next thing he knew, he too had burst into peal upon peal of gusty laughter. He felt as though nothing in the world mattered.

Shakily, quaking with mirth, he clawed his way into the adjoining living tent and sat down, trying vainly to recover control. He laughed so much that it hurt; and as the queer poison of the zipping laughing bugs worked deeper into his system, he began to lose all consciousness of his surroundings.

CHAPTER III

BRIG became suddenly aware that his head ached, that he was shaking like a leaf. He opened his eyes and peered around the tent. Monty and Cynthia were there,

slumped into portable chairs, breathing hard, utterly disheveled and overcome with reaction.

Outside the tent there was stillness. Sunlight had disappeared, but Europa, Ganymede and Callisto compensated for the loss.

Brig stirred stiffly. "Whew! What a hangover!"

Wincing, he got to his feet. He was damp with sweat. Vainly he tried to piece together the intervening hours—or minutes, but with no success. The hysteria had gone now, but the reaction was terrific. . . . Moving across to the kit, he jerked out a bottle of restorative, forced it down his throat. Then he revived Monty and the girl. Groaning, they sat up.

Cynthia, pale and perspiring, looked up with lack-luster eyes.

"Brig, what happened?" she asked dully; and briefly he told her.

"Betts!" called Monty wearily. "Betts, where are you? Come here. . . ."

"He went out into the jungle," Brig told him. "So far, he hasn't come back. I guess I'd better go out and find him."

He turned towards the tent door, mastering his shaking limbs, but at the same instant, Betts came slowly through it. His thin hair was draped over his forehead, his clothes were torn and filthy. Under one arm he carried something like a pink melon.

Unsteadily, he made his way to the center of the tent, the eyes of the others following him in amazement. Reverently he laid the melon down. Only then did it become evident that it was alive!—a living organism with a vast distended mouth gaping weirdly.

"Ohhh!" Cynthia yelped in horror, leaping up; then she sat down again as her head spun like a top.

"B-Betts, take—take that horrible thing away at once!"

"Never knew anything like it," Betts muttered uncertainly, passing a hand over his brow. "Woman. . . . Laughter. . . . Now this!" He raised a plump finger significantly to his lips, and whispered, "Sssh! Listen to this!" Then, swinging around to the melon, he barked, "What is two and two?"

"Four!" the melon answered promptly, in a husky voice.

Brig's eyes popped. Cynthia and Monty stared at each other like a couple of drunks.

"Then, Heaven be praised, I am not intoxicated!" Betts breathed in relief. "It does talk! I'm plain, cold sober!" Standing erect, he tried to regain his dignity, but like the others he was still quaking from the hysteria's reaction.

Brig strode across. "Look here, what is this?" he demanded, staring at the thing that was devoid of eyes, ears and nose—that was all mouth and nothing more. "Where'd you get this? Did it actually say 'Four' just now, or do you include ventriloquism among your accomplishments?"

"This, sir, is a true native of Io," Betts observed stiffly. "It is made up of carbohydrates, and consumes carbohydrates for nourishment. Normally we are wont to call carbohydrates sugar, starch, and so forth—but you must admit they can exist in minute quantities in the air—especially here. The invisible mites which are constantly swarming into its mouth are of carbohydrate basis."

"But this thing's a fruit!" Brig yelled.

"No, sir—forgive me. It is carbon, developed along human lines. You notice the absence of chlorophyll, the green substance by which plants break down inorganic matter

and so build up organic matter from the simplest constituents. If this were a true plant, it would be green. It is protoplasmic, cellular — carbon, sir! I am given to understand that it is only part of a parent tree, but can live quite comfortably by itself."

"Yeah?" Brig was still gaping.

"It is intelligent. It reasons. It talks by impressing sound waves on the air from its interior bladder; those sound waves resemble human words. Is that so strange, sir? A good musician can make his violin closely imitate a human voice by producing the right sound waves. . . . Most bizarre, sir—most bizarre!"

BRIG came to himself suddenly. "But where the devil did you get the thing?" he demanded.

"She gave it to me, sir. I met her in the jungle. . . . A most delightful young lady. Quite educated, too."

"Young lady! Jungle!" Brig gulped. "What the devil are you talking about?"

Cynthia and Monty got out of their chairs and came closer, staring at Betts wonderingly. He didn't seem very certain of himself.

"When I was laughing, sir—for which I shall never forgive myself—I blundered into the jungle. I came face to face with a young woman, very . . . ahem! . . . lightly clad. She gave me a weed of some kind that stopped my laughing. She was carrying this—er—organism under her arm and, after a while, gave it to me. Then she told me all about its origin and life. Finally she suggested we listen very carefully to what it had to say. . . ."

Betts stopped and cast his eyes roofwards. "I wonder, sir, if I dreamed it?"

"You bet you did!" Brig snapped.

"The organism is real enough, but the girl—! Hang it all, Betts! And her talking in English, too! The thing's impossible.

"Maybe, sir; I'm still not too sure."

Brig shrugged. "Well, anyway, we've no time now to bother about your dreams. You'd better scramble some breakfast together—if it is breakfast, that is. We've got to head for the Jove side and collect those carbon pencils. The sooner we get out of this nutty place, the better I'll like it."

"Very good, sir." Shaking his head doubtfully, Betts went outside to the cooking tent.

In silence, Brig studied the mouthy object, and the more closely he studied it, the more it became apparent that it was palpitating slowly with life energy. Its mouth, too, was a mass of fine hairs, evidently flawlessly designed for catching invisible aerial mites and retaining them.

"Two and two?" he questioned suddenly.

"Four," came the prompt answer, but the mouth didn't move. The sound came from inside.

"It's a trick," muttered Monty disgustedly. "Betts must have been drunk and fashioned this thing. Break it open and see what makes it tick—"

"It's no trick," Brig interrupted, shaking his head. "The thing is quite intelligent. I'm not overly surprised. After all, there's some plant on Titan that's a natural singer. This isn't so queer. . . . What's your name?" he finished suddenly.

"Jack Horner. Sit in the corner, eating curds and whey."

"But—but he didn't!" Cynthia said, thinking. "It was Bo-Peep, or somebody. . . ."

"It was Miss Muffet, darling," Monty said patiently.

Brig raised his eyebrows. "Darling, huh? Nice going for a best man. . . ." His lips tightened a little as he turned back to the thing.

"Jack Horner, eh? Anything else?"

"A stands for Atmosphere, not very much here; but if you stop in the valley you've nothing to fear. B stands for—"

"All right, all right," Brig interrupted hastily; and he turned aside, pondering. "Where the devil did this thing pick up such nursery rhymes?" he asked blankly. "Somebody's taught it them, and with a modern flavor, too."

"Perhaps there was a woman," Cynthia suggested, languidly.

"But, Cyn, it is so absurd! What woman could there be here, in a crackpot place like this, who'd teach a melon nursery rhymes? The thing's idiotic. Besides—"

"C is for Carbon in so many forms, Io is full of it, life simply spawns," Jack Horner observed. "D is for diamond, which is carbon quite true, money and fortune for me and for you."

"What's that?" Cynthia asked abruptly, gazing alertly.

"He's right," Brig murmured. "Diamonds are pure carbon. It never occurred to me that—"

"There may be something in it, sir," Betts remarked, as he came in with a loaded tray. "I heard Mr. Horner's last words. Possibly there are diamonds in plenty on the Jove side of this globe. It would seem the young lady's request that we listen to Mr. Horner's observations was quite significant."

"You still believe you saw her, don't you?" Brig smiled.

"I do lean to the view, sir, yes."

My father suffered from delusions through excess of alcohol, but acquired traits are not inheritable. Therefore I did not suffer from delusions."

"Sound reasoning," Brig grinned; then he became serious. "Guess I could do with a handful of diamonds at that. Might repair my shattered fortunes."

"Come to think of it, so could I," murmured Cynthia, giving her brain unaccustomed hard work. "I mean to say one can be quite independent of parental wishes if one has a private fortune, can't one?"

Monty's eyes brightened at the hidden cunning in her voice.

"By gad, rather! Deuced ~good, Cyn—deuced good."

Brig regarded them in puzzlement for a moment, then turned back to Betts.

"The minute we're through with this meal, we'll head for the Jove side—all of us. We've enough space-suits."

"Very good, sir."

Cynthia snickered, "Suits me! I've always wanted to see a diamond naked, so to speak. . . ."

AN HOUR later, encased in clumsy, heavy-booted space-suits, the four headed away from the clearing towards the valley side two miles distant. Save for occasional encounters with swamp region, and less frequently with the savage impalers, they made the trip without mishap. Then began the long, arduous climb to the five hundred foot summit of the valley side.

Never before had they quite realized the oddity of this world. This valley, drawn by the terrific pull of Jupiter, contained all the air the satellite possessed. At a 250-foot height, it thinned out perceptibly—

nothing could live long in it, save perhaps the suicidal champagne flitters.

At 300 feet the air was dehydrated; at 500 feet it was almost a vacuum. . . .

Here, at the summit of the valley, the hot, steamy blue-black sky had become replaced by the virgin, soulless black of space, in which the neighboring moons and newly-risen sun hung with savage brilliance. The further the party moved beyond the valley summit, the lower the sun sank and the higher vast Jupiter poked himself over the opposite horizon.

At last they gained the broad, black-dusted plateau itself. Here, Jupiter was pouring forth his complete complement of yellow light, but according to the thermopile, hardly a trace of heat.

"Pressure almost zero, sir," Betts remarked, consulting the portable instruments he was carrying. "There is a faint trace of warmth, of nearly non-existent atmosphere. The former obviously comes from Jupiter's cold disk, and the latter is a surplus from the valley. . . ."

"Rather scary, isn't it?" muttered Cynthia, switching on her electric audiophone. "I almost wish we hadn't come."

"You can return if you want," Brig answered briefly, and he smiled a little at her expression behind the glass helmet. Incongruously enough, he suddenly wondered why the devil Monty had been with her in her tent the previous night. Silly thought!

Betts came up, unslung electrical equipment from his bloated shoulders.

"I've just been looking around, sir. Things are pretty much as Mr. Horner intimated, and also as I suspected. This side of the satellite is

mainly carbon—in various modifications. There are also traces of carbon dioxide gas collected here and there, probably left behind from the time when Jupiter was at its hottest and thereby produced a considerable amount of carbon combustion. Here, sir, is the residue. . . .”

His massive boot stirred dusty black crystals that faintly caught the light of Jove. Brig watched keenly.

“Guess it might explain Io’s relatively high albedo,” he remarked. “These things do reflect quite a deal of light.”

“Undoubtedly, sir. May I call your attention to that?”

His arm pointed to a small black cliff nearby, riddled with cave entrances, fronted again by massive coal-black boulders.

“Natural carbon cliff!” Brig whistled. “Come on. . . .”

He started the advance with Betts beside him. Once they gained the cave, Betts stepped forward and snapped off two of the thousands of carbon stalactites depending from the cave entrance. With considerable difficulty, he fixed them into the roughly designed clamps of the small electric motor he carried.

“I would advise looking away, sir,” he warned, fixing the battery terminals. “Now . . . let us see.”

He moved the small switch that operated the storage battery; almost instantly the separated carbon pencils flared into blinding life at their tips, created entirely by the resistance between them to the passage of current.

Betts fumbled for the switch; snapped it off. He stared at the dying red glow of the carbon points.

“That’s terrific!” Brig cried, clutching him eagerly. “Nice going, Betts! No ship can possibly miss a

signal of that brilliance. . . . Of course, it will mean somebody having to stay here to give the signal when a ship is sighted.”

“No, sir; forgive me. I have a time-table of the Earth-Pluto space service, and I have also kept a careful check of Earth hours since we arrived here. The next liner is due to pass near here in about four earth days. Therefore, a little in advance of that time, one of us will come here and give the signal.”

“Four more days in this ghastly place,” groaned Cynthia. “I wish to Heaven space travel had never been invented. . . . Incidentally,” she went on, with sudden keenness, “what about those diamonds? I don’t see any.”

“I fancy those rocks, miss. . . .” Betts murmured, and turning about, he headed towards the massive boulders fronting the cave entrance. For a while, he studied them in silence in the Jove light, then, removing his ax began to hack steadily. Three heavy chunks fell off into his glove.

“Wealth, beyond imagination,” he murmured, his face beatific behind the glass. “These rocks are pure diamonds. . . . Pure carbon without a trace of impurity.”

“You — you mean these entire rocks are diamonds?” babbled Monty hysterically.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Then why the devil hasn’t somebody collected them before this?” demanded Brig. “Untold wealth lying here. . . . It just isn’t possible.”

“Possibly there are two reasons, sir. For one thing, the dark side of Io has never been explored—not even by Murchinson and Snedley. For another, it is doubtful if anybody untrained in the various forms of carbon would recognize this stuff as pure diamond in the unfinished state.

Again, visitors are very few and far between here. The pull of Jove is—"

"O. K., never mind that," Brig interrupted. "We've found them and I guess that's all that matters. Come on; let's get the bags filled."

THE two capacious bags were opened up, Cynthia taking on the job of holding them open whilst the rock chippings were dropped into them. Her blue eyes went wider behind the glass every time she saw one fall. Her brain was no longer made up of cells but of surging dollar signs. . . .

When at last both bags were filled, Betts put his ax away with a sigh of content.

"The value is, of course, incalculable," he breathed; "and since we are joint discoverers, the claim will be filed both in the United States and Britain—"

He broke off in surprise as Cynthia suddenly gave a violent jerk, a vigorous movement, and waved her arms wildly. She began to kick desperately.

"Call them off!" she screamed frantically. "Call them off!"

It was immediately apparent what was the matter. . . . So absorbed had they all been in their collecting efforts, they had failed to notice a small army of curious, dull gray objects, not unlike fast moving tortoises, gathered around them. Now, governed by sheer curiosity, they were crawling over the boots of the party. It needed no imagination to realize they had come from the depths of the carbon cave.

"Life, here! In a vacuum!" cried Brig, threshing his boots wildly. "How the devil—"

"Carbon life, sir," Betts said, struggling hard to keep the things from puncturing his space-suit.

"Not—not so improbable. . . . Carbon is the element on which all life is built. . . . Remember, sir, that the carbon atom forms the basis of an unlimited number of compounds. Its atoms can form long chains, but these are the skeletons to which other life, of infinite complication, attaches itself. . . . Here, apparently, carbon has taken a form rare to our knowledge, but by no means outside probability. Maybe a formation of pure carbon, unconnected with any higher form. Carbon life, eating pure carbon, naturally— Damn! Pardon me, sir. I thought my space-suit was nearly through."

"We've got to get out of here," Brig panted, swinging around. Then he gave a cry. Cynthia and Monty were already well away from the things, were rushing towards the edge of the plateau leading down to the valley.

"Hey!" Brig yelled frantically. "Come back here! Give us a hand!"

"I'll get them, sir."

Betts dashed off after them, and Brig made to follow his leaping, floating form. . . . But in that he was too energetic; the toe of his heavy boot stubbed against one of the things, and he went sprawling. Before he could rise, they were swarming over him actively, tiny little scissor-like mouths working industriously on the fine metal of his space-suit.

Carbon, of course! It suddenly dawned on him. The metal of his suit had a carbon basis, mixed with innumerable other compounds. Probably the stuff was appetizing to them, something they had never known before. Whatever it was, they refused to be shaken free. As fast as he dusted them off, they came back again. His horrified eyes stared at growing dents and pockmarks.

He whirled round, determined to make a frantic effort to reach the plateau edge—but at that identical moment, the thing he most feared happened. Viciously sharp teeth plowed clean through the mesh, punctured his only protection against the airless void.

Instantly the pressure inside his suit ripped the tooth-hole open wide; air gushed mistily out and evaporated. He fell blindly on his knees, ready for instant death. He gasped chokingly as the air left his lungs. Blood oozed from his nostrils, hammered in his ears and smarting eyes.

He fell flat, aware of a terrific sense of inner pressures, of sudden violent near-apoplexy. He fought and struggled for the air that wasn't there, lay with his suit now flattened to his figure, trying to understand why he still felt warm in this utter emptiness.

Where the devil was Betts? Silly thought now, as he was dying.

He stared through tortured eyes, felt his senses swimming with the absence of life-giving oxygen. Then he saw something that for a split second summoned a vague stir of life back to his brain.

A woman! A woman almost unclothed, save for a fabric of some kind around breast and hips. She was speeding towards him in long, lithe movements, her black hair flat to her head through the absence of air.

Delusion, of course! He was dying. . . . He shut his eyes again, felt himself trailing off. Then yet again he opened them as a knife flashed before him in the Jove light. The woman was real. Her nose was bleeding freely; her eyes were starting in sheer torture from her head; yet she still had mastery over her movements.

With what appeared prodigious strength, she ripped off the remains of his space-suit, tore off his helmet. For some reason, Brig felt momentarily eased for that. Then he was aware of being lifted in strong arms. . . . Beyond that was a complete and utter dark. . . .

CHAPTER IV

BRIG stirred slowly, conscious of only one glorious fact—he was not dead. He was breathing steadily, drawing in deep breaths of glorious air. For a while, he did nothing else; then very gradually the memory of events began to trace back into his mind.

The half-clad girl in the zero cold, her strength, the knife, his unconsciousness. . . . He opened his eyes suddenly, and for a moment the sun and Europa light dazzled him a little—

There she was!—standing against a tree, watching him, smiling a little. Now that he could see her clearly, he realized he had never seen anybody quite so like a goddess. She was tall, with a snow-white skin, obviously caused by lack of ultraviolet at Io's great distance from the sun.

Her eyes seemed to be violet-colored, her hair black. Her clothing consisted merely of a light garment resembling a modern Earth swim-suit, but made of pulped vegetable matter.

Brig found his voice with difficulty as he sat up.

"S-say, am I nuts?" he whispered.

As her smile widened, he saw that her teeth were very regular and white. "Are you?" she asked, almost mischievously.

"Then you talk?—talk English?" He got to his feet and went across

to her. He judged she was about five foot seven tall, and muscled like a lioness.

"Yes, English," she assented, nodding her raven black head. "That is, English with American expression. I am an American, even though I've been here for the last twenty years. I'm Elsa Rutter, only child of the late Captain and Mrs. Rutter."

Brig stared at her, fingered the smudge of congealed blood under his nose.

"Of course, you're Brig Dean?" she said decisively.

"Yeah, that's right. You—you must be the girl Betts met up with when we were attacked by the manapes."

"Right!" she laughed. "I gave him Jack Horner. . . ."

Brig shrugged. "Of course, this is all screwy," he sighed. "Here I meet up with you and don't think much of it—just like I might meet a beautiful girl on the sidewalk back at home. I don't have to tell you I don't begin to get it, do I? How'd you come to be here, anyway?"

"Oh, it's pretty simple, really. Father and mother died here without being rescued. I was three when that happened. But I didn't die. Oh, no! You see, the Ionians took care of me—the bladder Ionians, like the one I gave to your friend Betts."

"And?"

"Well, the Ionians are actually trees with the power of locomotion on their roots. The bladder-mouths which talk are really only their fruit, their offsprings, as it were. You may have noticed from Jack Horner that they're not true plants; they have no chlorophyllic properties. They absorb oxygen and hydrogen just as you or I, and therefore are made up of the main carbohydrate order—sugar, glucose, fats, and so forth.

Therefore, by feeding me on their own substance, which they did, I had food comparable, if not better, than any normal child. See?"

"Yeah; I get it. And you live here, you say?"

She moved from her lounging position. Her satiny skin rippled with the action. "Yes, and I never want to leave. Suppose you come with me and see my home?"

"Nothing I'd like better, but I've my own party to think of."

"You're nearer my home than your own camp," she murmured. "Besides, surely you want to know more?"

"Plenty!" he agreed with vehemence, and at that she set the example by striding into the midst of the jungle, following a well worn trail with unerring accuracy. Brig began to wonder, as he stumbled along beside her, whether he was still unconscious; if this was a fantastic dream.

"You are lucky that I've kept my eye on you ever since your ship crashed here on Io," she murmured, glancing at him with her deeply blue eyes. "But for my calling the hysteria termites to a muster, you would have caught it pretty badly from the manapes."

BRIG snapped his fingers. "Then it was you! And I'll swear I heard your laugh about the same time, too!"

"Like this?" she suggested, and demonstrated with a peal of silvery notes.

"Like that," Brig agreed gravely; then after a pause, "I still don't figure how you came to be up there on the plateau, in pure void. You saved my life."

"That's why I say it's lucky I've kept my eye on you. I watched

where you went. I guessed that, having Jack Horner with you, you would hear him remark sooner or later about diamonds. . . . But that space walk of mine wasn't so very amazing. I've lived here all my life, and like a swimmer who can accustom himself to long periods under water, so have I, by occasional jaunts to the plateau, accustomed myself to void conditions."

"But the cold!" Brig protested.

"Did you feel cold when your space-suit ripped?"

"Come to think of it, I didn't."

She smiled. "Of course not. Empty space is a perfect insulator of heat; you radiated heat faster than it could escape. The cold made no impression on you. What did tax you, and me, too, was the lack of air. Lung control in swimming and void experiments helped me to save you. I just managed it—and only just. I cut off your space-suit to relieve the tremendous strain on the tissues of your body. A body can stay in void without bursting, but not for long. Depends on the strength of the body. I'm far stronger than you, of course. . . ."

"So I noticed," Brig murmured.

"Why not?" she asked quickly. "Io is only a third Earth normal. I have the body of an ordinary Earth woman, all the same muscles, but all my life I've been accustomed to a third the pull. The result has tripled my strength. Then there's open-air life, certain health-giving radiations from the moons which make up for those the sun is too far distant to give, feeding on carbohydrates. . . . Well, I'm pretty strong!" she finished with a laugh.

They plunged on for a while in silence. Brig noticed the flawless

ease with which she mastered the satellite's slight pull.

"Just how did you learn English?" he asked suddenly.

"Radio."

"Good Heavens, you don't mean—"

"Why not?" she smiled. "Although the ship was wrecked, a good deal of the equipment was in order. When I grew old enough to understand life a little, I started to make myself comfortable. I read the ship's books and learned the rudiments of language, learned all about radio, electricity, the space I live in, and so forth. There was no electricity, so I soon fixed that. I took the ship's electric engines and attached them to a home-made water-wheel. It works as good as a turbine and keeps a generator going. I run it from a stream near my place. . . . That started the radio. I tuned in Earth, Mars, Venus, Uranus—all the principal planets, and so little by little learned how to talk. Come to think of it, I've heard your name mentioned many a time as an ace spaceman. That right?"

Brig nodded slowly. "I guess so; yes. But I'm rather sick of it. It doesn't bring much happiness. I've made money, and lost it, chained myself up to a girl with a feather-weight brain and— Well, I guess that doesn't interest you, anyhow. There's one thing. Why exactly did you give Betts that Jack Horner thing?"

"Well, I usually carry a Jack Horner around with me for company and, when I had cured Betts of his laughing, I thought it might be a good idea if he took Jack with him. You see, I knew Jack would come out with that line about diamonds, and I thought the information would be useful to you and your

party. Diamonds are valuable on Earth, of course. . . ."

"That was decent of you, Elsa," Brig said quietly. "Just the same, I don't think I got as big a kick out of finding those diamonds as the others did. Cynthia in particular."

"She's rather good looking, isn't she?"

Brig shrugged. "I guess so. . . . Tell me, why the blazes did you teach Jack Horner those nursery rhymes?"

"Not only him, all the Ionians," she laughed. "I used things around them that they'd understand, like 'A is for Atmosphere,' and so on. . . . Well, here we are!" she finished suddenly.

Brig looked up to find that they had entered a clearing—a clearing almost filled with a large ranch-like house fashioned from trees, ship's metal, numberless metal crates and boxes, leaves and vines. Stilts raised it a trifle from the soft ground.

Around it on all sides depended the tree Ionians, slow-moving protoplasm-yellow objects not dissimilar from Earthly beeches, smothered in yellow foliage from the midst of which poked the ridiculous mouthing faces of dozens of Jack Horners. . . .

As Brig and the girl approached them, they set up a chorus of welcome—the oddest chorus, mixed with American slang, obviously learned from radio, the girl's teaching, and their own subtle, peculiar imagination. Feathery branches reached down and caressed the girl affectionately as she passed by. Her slender white hand reached up and stroked the soft, golden foliage.

"Grand people," she said seriously, and led the way into her shack.

INSIDE the shack, Brig gazed around in approval. The vast length of the single room was perfectly, though crudely furnished, some of it recognizable as ship's material; the rest was home-made. A badly scratched radio of ancient design, skilfully patched up, stood by the glassless window. Tables, chairs, a sofa—even electric light generated from the simple turbine standing over the stream outside—they were all present.

"I shouldn't have thought you'd need light here," Brig remarked.

"Oh, but I do. Now and again there are periods when Io is without light for several hours—when all the moons and the sun are below the horizon simultaneously. Then there are occasional eclipses. . . ."

He nodded slowly, watched her graceful, queenly figure moving swiftly back and forth. She hummed softly to herself as she moved; outside, a group of Jack Horners began with "A is for Atmosphere. . . ." Silly, absurd place, of course! And yet, not altogether. The girl was real enough—very beautiful, very happy, a goddess in a little back-water of peace.

She paused in the business of setting forth a meal of heavy fruits and tree-sap wine and looked across at Brig seriously.

"That was a good idea with the carbon arcs, Brig. When—when do you leave?"

"About four days," he answered slowly. "Then it's back to the old regime. Marriage to Cynthia, fortune from diamonds, enlistment in the coming war with Mars over the Canal Control question. Damned silly, isn't it?" he asked abruptly.

"It sounds it," she admitted. "I'm shut off here from that sort of thing. . . ."

She went on preparing the meal, finally signaled him to the table. With an unexpected feeling of drowsy content, he munched the soft fruits, drank the smooth wine. He'd half-expected the girl would eat like a young savage, but she didn't. Instead, she used old but serviceable cutlery from the ship.

"Even here, a lady must preserve her dignity," she smiled across at him. "I know just what is civilized from the radio. Incidentally, if you need tobacco, you'll find some tins of it in the corner there. Been sealed for twenty years, and still perfectly fresh."

"Thanks, I don't smoke. . . ." he said absently, then went on reflectively. "Even here a lady must preserve her dignity. I've heard that put in a different way by Cynthia—the girl I'm going to marry."

"Love her?" Elsa asked casually.

"Funny, but I'm not sure. I think she got herself engaged to me, more than me to her. Frankly, I don't think I do love her—now. . . ."

The girl looked back at her food, said nothing. Brig found his thoughts wandering. The long slumbering idealism in his make-up was beginning to come to life, and with it a certain bewilderment. For some reason, everything outside of this little peaceful place was unimportant.

Diamonds, wealth, Earth, Cynthia. . . . Meaningless parade. He had already tasted life in most of its phases and found it pretty much the same—drab. Colorless.

BRIG stopped through the long Ionian night, made himself comfortable on the sofa. The girl, for her part, took up what she proclaimed was her normal position—a restful pose deep in the gathering

arms of a tree Ionian outside, raised high above whatever insectile life there might be crawling on the wet ground.

Brig slept well, happily. The next morning, the girl showed him the pool made by the turbine stream, demonstrated her magnificent swimming abilities. For an hour, they sported together in the cool depths—and all the time at the back of Brig's mind were troubled thoughts, separated from the immediate delight of this paradise of soft water, friendly childlike organism trees, and shifting, eternal lights—thoughts removed from the soft, alluring beauty of the girl. . . .

"Thinking?" Elsa asked gently, and Brig turned sharply on the warm rock slab on which they were lying. In silence, he studied her beautiful face and still-damp, black, gleaming hair.

"Yes—of things I shouldn't," he admitted bitterly.

"Such as?" she murmured.

"You, mostly."

She lay on her back and clasped white arms behind her head. In silence she watched Europa moving across the sky.

"And why should you not think of me? We're friends, aren't we?"

"Friends!" Brig echoed hollowly. "It's a mighty poor word from my point of view, Elsa. For one thing, you saved my life up there on the plateau. For another, you've shown me something I've looked for all my life. That something is peace and happiness. Here on Io there is so much that could be done—"

"That would mean bringing others, unwanted people," she interrupted quietly. "Here there is peace; others would wreck it."

"Are you never lonely?"

She rose up at that, looked at him

steadily with her deep, glorious eyes. "Not often, Brig; but sometimes I think I would like the company of just one other human. . . . I am still Earthly in being, of course, though Io has molded me. I could never live on Earth—never anywhere except here."

Brig fell moodily silent through an interval, then slid off the rock. Holding out his arms, he helped the girl down, held her for a moment with her face very close to his. With a sigh, he released her.

"I have to go, Elsa," he muttered. "I have my duty to do to the others—to Cynthia, Monty, and good old Betts. . . . Perhaps some day I might come back."

"Perhaps," she agreed simply. "You're in love with me, Brig, aren't you?"

"Yes. But I still have my duty to do. That's the worst of hide bound convention."

She studied him for a full half minute, then turned suddenly aside. "I have a small compass you may find useful. Your camp is due north from here. Io's north magnetic pole is strong enough for needle deflection. . . ."

She went quietly into the shack, returned with the compass and a small vegetable bag of fruit. Silently Brig took them.

"This isn't goodbye, Elsa," he said quietly. "I really will come back one day—when Cynthia tires of me. I—"

"Goodbye, Brig," she interrupted quietly, and held out her white hand. He took it gently, regarded her delicate, inviting mouth, then turned abruptly away without another word.

Cursing himself with every step he took, he headed towards the clearing's northerly exit, but upon the

very point of plunging into the jungle he stopped dead, listening in amazement to a familiar voice.

"H is for Hut which lies to the south; believe in Jack Horner though he's mostly all mouth. . . ."

"South. . . . South by the stars, of course," remarked an accompanying voice. "H is for Hut. . . . Young lady? A dream? I begin to doubt. Most certainly I begin to—"

The talking stopped. A portly figure, dishevelled and stained, emerged from the jungle's depths, the gaping-mouthed Jack Horner under one arm.

"Betts!" Brig yelled wildly, swinging around. "Betts, you old son of a space bull! Where the devil did you come from?"

BETTS' voice trembled a little. "Thank God you're safe, Mr. Dean—thank God! This is indeed a wonderful surprise. . . . You see, on leaving the plateau, Miss Cynthia fainted from the shock of being attacked by those carbon eaters. By the time his Lordship and I had revived her, some ten minutes had gone. I went back to look for you, but you'd disappeared. I was convinced of the horrible thought you had blown asunder. . . . You see, sir, I found your ripped space-suit."

"One can't blow apart in empty space," Brig grinned.

"Dear me, sir! Murchinson and Snedley distinctly stated—"

"Be damned with Murchinson and Snedley. Here—meet Miss Elsa Rutter, daughter of the late Captain and Mrs. Rutter. . . ."

Betts bowed as he girl came slowly up. "Delighted, miss—though I have already had the pleasure. At last I know what happened to the Rutters. They had a daughter."

"That is hardly historical news,"

the girl laughed; then seriously, "But what brings you here to this place of mine?"

"Well, one reason was that I knew I hadn't dreamt about seeing a young woman in the forest, and another was that Mr. Horner here started talking about a hut to the south. I realized it might lead to your possible abode. . . . So I came. Then again, though I told his Lordship and Miss Cynthia that you had apparently been killed, I could not rid myself of the idea that you might be alive somewhere. I fancied this young lady might know something about it. . . . So I came. Forgive me, sir, for monopolizing so much time in explanation."

"That's all right, Betts," Brig smiled, then he shrugged his shoulders heavily. "Well, I guess we'd better be heading back, hadn't we?"

"If you wish, sir—but I feel bound to point out that you will not be exactly—ah—welcome."

"Huh? Why not?"

"Much as I regret it, both Cynthia and his Lordship were delighted when they knew you had been killed. Some trifling matter of diamonds, sir. I understand their possession releases Miss Cynthia from the obligation of marrying you."

Brig stared blankly, past events shuttling through his mind. Little incidents—Monty in Cynthia's tent, her eagerness to achieve independence, their interest in each other. . . .

"I get it," he nodded slowly. "So she was marrying me to grab her old man's money when he dies and an allowance for life in the meantime. Nice going."

"Yes, sir. When I disapproved of their satisfaction at your decease they—or rather his Lordship, discharged me. My last act was to

give them the exact time when a space liner is due, and to extract the assurance that they know how to operate the carbon arc signal. . . . Then I left, always with the assurance, sir, that I could signal the next liner if my searchings in the jungle proved futile."

"I am afraid there is much I do not understand," Betts admitted.

"But you will!" Brig cried joyfully. "All in good time. You'll be able to learn about Io and be the perfect servant and scientist at the same time. Then—" Brig stopped suddenly. "Oh, gosh! Elsa and I want to be married but there's nobody present to make it legal."

A beautiful smile spread over Betts' round face. "Forgive me for my temerity, but I was, in my—ahem—younger days, intended for Holy Orders. By the Convention of 2119, once a clergyman always a clergyman, even though I took to service afterwards. I, sir, can perform that ceremony."

Brig drew the girl towards him. "Betts all over, sweetheart," he murmured. "Servant, scientist, and now clergyman. O. K., Betts, let's go. . . ."

"Very good, sir." He tugged fiercely at his hip pocket and wrenched forth a battered version of the 2100 Bible. . . .

"As I have frequently said, sir, the well trained servant is the master of many vocations," he murmured. "Now, if you will please join hands. . . ."

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A Vision of Possibility

(OUR COVER SUBJECT)

by EANDO BINDER

Let us follow a certain tall, thin visitor to the New York World's Fair—the "World of Tomorrow"—as he views its futuristic wonders. He passes the amusement area with scarcely a stop, being serious-minded.

First he views the automobile exhibit and sees intricate machinery shape the motor car before his eyes. It is a symbol of civilization's gigantic capacity to turn out machine-products of any sort in mass quantities, almost overnight.

Next, this sight-seer stops at an electrical demonstration that features a robot performing by remote radio control. It moves levers, presses buttons, opens doors, lifts objects — all under command of a human operator a hundred feet away. And he could be a hundred miles away! In the future, thousands of such robots would be in service, in peacetimes, as servitors—and perhaps in wartimes, as super-soldiers impervious to bullets!

Now a visit to the astounding display of science. A demonstration of television promises that soon television will picture all world events as they happen. This means that no startling occurrence could fail to be known simultaneously in any corner of the world. That was food for thought!

Another part of the science exhibit is even more amazing, to our visitor. A model of a cyclotron—an atom-smashing machine—is described and explained. Free energy has been obtained from broken atoms, microscopic amounts as yet, but each year more and more, as research marches on. Some day, energy will flow out like a river—limitless, giant power that will make coal and oil obsolete!

A thought strikes the thin visitor. This power from the locked core of the atom will make possible new and terrifying weapons—frightful death-rays much more destructive than the largest cannon. The tall, thin visitor moves on with a concentrated look of worry in his face.

We next find him viewing a detailed diorama model of a future city. The 20th century city, the labels say, has passed its peak of development. From now on, the trend will be toward decentralization of population. The ideal city of the future—conceived by H. G. Wells—shows buildings set singly within a great park-like landscape. Residences are far-flung, and the millions of people are scattered hundreds of miles in every direction. No slums exist in this beautiful city.

The visitor, strangely, frowns as he takes this in. But he frowns still more as an-

other futurist innovation comes to his attention. Each city is to have a vast underground system of tunnels and chambers, so that, in case of war and aerial bombing, all business and industrial activities can be transferred underground and there carry on, safe from the above-ground destruction. This future city would not become the paralyzed shambles present-day New York would be if attacked.

But if he has been dismayed by what enormous changes the future holds in store, the visitor we have followed is utterly shocked by what he now views. It is a clever representation of the interior of a rocket-ship. Imaginary trips are made, with movie reels, to the Moon, Venus and Mars. A lecturer then explains that it is all not so fantastic as it might seem. Engineers could today construct such a space-ship, complete with air, food and the necessities of life. All that is needed is the fuel, or the power to traverse space.

Our visitor is stunned as his mind flashes back to the atomic-power exhibit. Once they had that, they had the needed rocket power!

The tall, thin visitor departs suddenly. Pulling his hat low, he leaves the Fair grounds, his beady eyes glittering. Out in a secluded spot, away from prying eyes, he extracts a small instrument from under his coat. At the same time he pulls lumps of wax from his face. Our visitor is suddenly revealed—he is not human! He is a Martian, in cunning disguise. He has been sent to Earth, and the Fair, to spy out what it reveals.

He reports now to a space-ship hovering high over Earth, into his beam-radio: "V-88 speaking! Attack now! Destroy this center of the Earthlings' present and future progress. They have now, or soon will have: overnight production of any mechanisms, robot-soldiers, television that will preclude surprise attack, atomic-powered weapons, future cities in which scattered and underground inhabitants can never be defeated, and, lastly — rocket ships, with which to attack our world! We must wage a war of prevention—before the Earthlings become too powerful. Before they become the masters of the Solar System. Strike—now!"

And an hour later, a great space-ship appears like a vulture over the Perisphere and Trylon, raining down frightful destructive forces. . . .

Such is the story behind the cover scene artist Paul has so vividly portrayed.

BROTHERS OF FATE

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Karlas Jann lived the life of a guinea pig until his brain reached the highest degree of intelligence ever derived in a man! But the great experiment back-fired when the super-brain became a ruthless tyrant!

KARLAS JANN, self-proclaimed Master of the World, gazed in manifest ennui at the three old scientists who faced him across the desk in his office. He was spare, red-haired, stern-faced, and his eyes held far too much wisdom.

"You've been sent to plead with me," he summed up. "You invoke my 'gratitude' to you, my 'duty' as to parents and benefactors." They cringed before his glare. "What do I owe you? It chanced that I was born a twin. You professors, having gained control of my brother and me, thought to experiment with diverse environments for identical creatures. My brother, Paul, was left to a normal life; I was super-schooled, super-stimulated, super-groomed mentally and spiritually. I surpassed my brother, and you forthwith decreed that I should surpass the race. Education, artificial changes by medicine and surgery, hypnosis, diet—" He broke off to laugh fiercely. "Quite a guinea pig I've been, eh? A guinea pig that's become a world-swallowing dragon! And it's your fault, not mine."

"We admit our error," tremblingly ventured one of the three doctors. "Yet it must be understood that—"

"No demands, please," interrupted Karlas Jann at once. "I shall make all demands from this day forward. It is my right—because of my might. First, as history's foremost engineer, I developed the Jann atomic motor

that now does the labor for all mankind. Second, as super-tactitian and war-lord, I marshalled my robots to destroy the armies of the allied nations, and to blast out of existence every lethal weapon as it was mustered against me. Now I shall assume my third great role—that of Master of the World. Outside, in my audience chamber," and for the first time his voice rang exultantly, "are gathered three hundred men. They came here, at my call, as Earth's reigning princes, presidents, dictators. They shall depart, at my order, as my servants and errand-boys."

The three old faces opposite him showed deep dismay and horror. Karlas Jann grinned mirthlessly. "You see, you should have left me as Paul was. Did you say he had accompanied you?"

The oldest man made reply: "Yes. He is a professor of philosophy, as you may know, at a little college in Nebraska. He sits in the reception chamber, hoping to add his prayers to ours."

Karlas Jann pursed disdainful lips. "Philosophy, eh? And a college professor—well, send my brother in. I may be amused, but I shall not be moved."

THE three hundred rulers sat in almost unbearable suspense in Karlas Jann's audience hall, as full fifteen minutes crept on past the time set for the manifesto of their

conqueror. Yet, when the inner door opened and the spare, flame-haired figure stepped through and approached the speaker's desk, not one among all those once-proud listeners dared move or mutter.

Jann seemed more drawn of face than when he had spoken with the three scientists in his office, and his lean right hand quivered as it arranged a red lock at his temple. Then he began to speak, steadily but wearily:

"Every man of you has dreaded this moment, as well as every hearer of my words by the various radio systems here in operation; therefore let me say at once that all has been changed—changed by a certain factor forgotten by all men, even by me for a time.

"You, the heads of nations, have come here for orders. Attention, then: Return, each of you, to your various countries, and there elect or appoint honest delegates to meet and form a world league of friendship, progress and kindness. Since no single government has weapons left with which to make war, there is no reason for jealousy, fear or distrust. Let the basic good-will of human beings for each other point the way to this new fellowship of nations. If you need further guidance, I recommend the teachings of Plato, Spinoza, Abraham Lincoln.

"Beyond this I am not needed. The Jann machines can be operated by engineers already trained, and the new or incomplete devices in the Jann Laboratories should not be beyond the talents of good scientists to finish and operate.

"I retire into obscurity, and surely nobody will be so rash as to suggest otherwise. Only if you, as individuals or nations, show treachery and spite to each other, shall I emerge and punish. Goodbye and good luck."

JANN left the audience hall, and only when the door had closed behind him did his hearers look blankly at each other.

In the inner office a beautiful dark-haired woman crouched tearfully above the still form of a man. Her grief-blanching face turned upward as the door slammed.

"How did you get here?" Jann asked her.

"I sneaked in—I'm Paul's fiancée." Her voice rose brokenly. "Karlas Jann, how could you kill him—your own brother?"

His red head bowed, as if in admission of guilt. "Yes, my own brother. But I had to kill him. The fate of the world rested on that act."

"But he was good, gentle, loving!" she protested, weeping. "You killed him for—nothing! Oh, some power greater than yours will punish you, Karlas Jann!"

"Please," he interposed softly, "you take too much for granted. Look closely at that dead thing, and then at me."

She bent close above the corpse, examined the slack face, drew in her breath sharply. Suddenly she sprang erect, staring into the eyes of the living man.

"Why—" she choked. "Why—" And then, in sudden exultation: "You're Paul!"

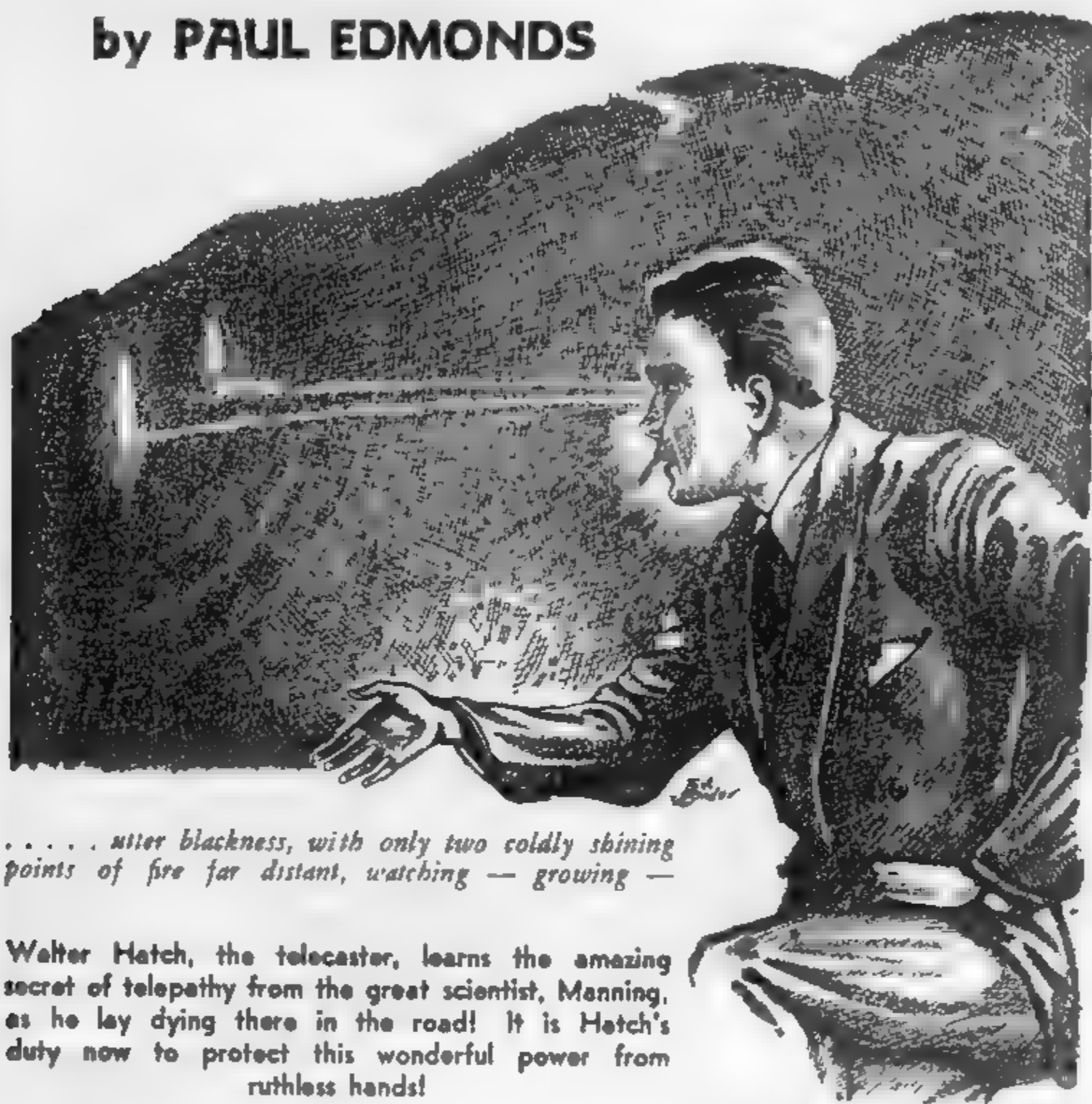
WINGS FOR SALE

The Editors of SCIENCE FICTION feel that they are selling you more than just a magazine, more than just a means of entertainment—for Science Fiction gives you wings that carry you into the deepest reaches of the Cosmos, away from the humdrum existence of the everyday world. The entire Universe is in your grasp, when you read

SCIENCE FICTION

"TELEPATHY IS NEWS!"

by PAUL EDMONDS



... utter blackness, with only two coldly shining points of fire far distant, watching — growing —

Walter Hatch, the telecaster, learns the amazing secret of telepathy from the great scientist, Manning, as he lay dying there in the road! It is Hatch's duty now to protect this wonderful power from ruthless hands!

WALTER HATCH, Globe Telecaster's ace columnist of the air, hurried into his office, glancing at his wristwatch. "Two minutes to spare," he said to Jean Hill, his secretary. "What's the latest?"

She put a few strips of tape on his desk as he sat down. "Just these."

"Yeah." Hatch scanned them hastily, his lean, dark face taut. Ten years of newswork hadn't managed to accustom him to the nervous excitement of his task—scooping other

newscasters. "The usual stuff. No lead headline?"

Jean shook her head. "Not a thing."

"Well, here's where I lose another friend," Hatch grunted. He pulled the televisor into position before him, arranged his notes deftly. "I promised to keep this under my hat, but—it's news."

A warning buzz sounded. The televisor screen glowed red. Hatch was on the air. His voice came, crisp and clear.

"Flash! Here it comes, folks—the biggest news item since Australia seceded back in 1970. Your reporter got on the track of it just today. Take my word for it, when we enter the twenty-first century in two years, we'll be living in an entirely different world. I learned today that Doctor Albert Manning, Los Angeles psychologist, has discovered the secret of telepathy!

"Get it, folks! Communication without words—every brain an open book! No more secrets! No more telling your wife you were working late at the office—she'll read your mind instead of smelling your breath. Telepathy isn't new; it was proved possible by the Duke University experiments in 1988. And in the Harvard Medical School it was found that the human brain emitted energy—alpha waves. Doctor Manning started from those crude beginnings, and I predict that within the year all Earth will be telepathy-conscious. We'll communicate as ants do, by waves, by mind-radio. And here's another theory of Doctor Manning's—try and believe it!—he says that the telepathic function is a recessive characteristic in man, and that before the dawn of history, it was dominant. Prehistoric man may have been a mind-reader!—just as you'll be in a year or two. Public enemies, make a note of this! The day telepathy becomes known to all, your alibis will be useless!"

Then Hatch went on to other items. In fifteen minutes he went off the air, and leaned back, perspiring. "Cigarette, Jean . . . Thanks." He blew smoke luxuriously through his nostrils.

"Is that really true? The telepathy item, I mean?" The girl was wide-eyed.

"If Hatch broadcasts it, it's so," the newscaster quoted, grinning.

"Sure. I saw Manning today. Had a hard time breaking his shell, too. He swore me to secrecy."

Jean's eyebrows quirked up. "That means a lot."

"Well, I wouldn't have released the news if we'd got another headline. But I can't go on the air without a flash—you know that. Matter of fact, Manning seemed to think I could help him. He was a bit afraid of censorship—thought the government might crack down. I promised I'd let him go on the air if that happened." Hatch snorted. "But I can see myself doing it. Ray Gerold and his secret police would be on my neck muy pronto. That'd mean a concentration camp—and what would my public do without me?" He hesitated at the look that came into Jean's eyes. "Oh—sorry, kid."

"That's all right." But the girl didn't look happy. Her father had died in a concentration camp for political prisoners. He had been too outspoken in his criticism of the autocratic government that ruled America in 1998. And it was dangerous to criticize either Commander Alford Perrett or his right-hand man, Raymond Gerold, chief of the secret police.

THE autocracy had come slowly but inevitably. The economic depression of 1945-49 had turned the country into a gunpowder cask. Political leaders and theorists had set up their cults; hunger-crazed mobs had looted whole cities; and a group of northwestern states had talked of secession. But not until 1980 had they carried out their plan, on learning that war had been declared between Western Europe and America for possession of Canada.

Germany, Italy, and England had formed an alliance; France was dy-

ing, her territory ruthlessly absorbed by neighboring countries. The British colonies had cast off their allegiance to the mother country, but only Australia and Canada managed to maintain independence. England refused to give up Canada, and, since America would not permit the landing of foreign troops on the continent, an abortive war had come.

It had not lasted long. The Soviet-Chinese coalition, a vast Oriental commune, saw its chance to crush Europe, and for a while everything pointed to a cataclysmic struggle that would decimate Earth. But somehow diplomats had poured oil on the waters, and the three great powers subsided into volcanic peace. Then Perrett and Gerold had come into power. They had gathered an army, marched into the seceding northwestern states, and put down the rebellion. Perrett was the hero of America, and in a whirlwind coup d'etat he had marched on Washington, imprisoned the President, and proclaimed himself ruler of a country under martial law.

So much the general public knew. Hatch knew a little more—that the British dictator, for example, had secretly agreed to cede Canada to the United States provided Perrett aided the European autocracies in a war to subdue the great Soviet commune. The Hawaiian islands were to provide the spark—and the spark was lit and smouldering.

Hatch didn't give a damn. The political situation didn't touch him directly and so, like innumerable others, he was satisfied because his personal wants were filled. Once in a while, goaded by some murderously oppressive act, he toyed with the idea of broadcasting the details to the world; but Hatch wasn't a fool. When the secret police made an arrest, the

offender vanished into a concentration camp or worse.

Now he got up and mixed a Scotch-and-soda. "Another day," he said to Jean. "And another headline to dig up for tomorrow."

The teletype crackled. Hatch nodded toward it. "May be the answer to our prayer. Catch it."

Jean tore off the tape, read it hurriedly. Her blue eyes held a curious look as she glanced up at Hatch.

"Well—read it!" he said impatiently.

Tonelessly the girl read, "Doctor Albert Manning has just been arrested at his Los Angeles home. No details are available."

Hatch was perfectly motionless for a moment. Then he took a long drink.

"That all it says?"

Jean nodded. Hatch suddenly put down the glass on his desk. "Well?"

The girl's gaze was coolly scornful. "I didn't say anything."

"No . . . damn it, Jean—it was news!"

"I've some typing to do. Is there anything else?"

Hatch hesitated, shook his head. Silently the girl went out. The newscaster finished his drink. There were beads of perspiration on his bronzed face. The television clicked twice. Hatch opened the switch.

On the screen a face swam into visibility, plump and well-shaved. "Mr. Hatch?"

"Yeah."

"A personal message from Raymond Gerold. You are asked to make no mention in your broadcast of Doctor Manning's arrest. Also, a bonus of two thousand dollars had been awarded you for supplying the government with important information."

With a swift movement, Hatch

turned off the televisor. He remained motionless at his desk, staring unseeingly at the wall . . .

MORE than anything else, it was the memory of the look in Jean Hill's eyes that made Hatch decide to act. The thought of defying Gerold did not enter into his plans, but it might be possible to effect some compromise. The newscaster had influential friends. By careful wire-pulling, he was able to discover that Manning was in a concentration camp near San Bernardino, some sixty miles east of Los Angeles. He was being held incommunicado, but Hatch managed to get a pass. For the rest, he trusted to luck. He was anxious to see Manning, for there were unpleasant rumors of the treatment accorded prisoners in the camps.

A note he received made him change his schedule. "They're planning on moving Manning before you arrive. He's to be sent by stratosphere plane to South America. You'll never be able to find him in one of the jungle camps." The message was unsigned, but Hatch knew that it came from a friendly guard in the camp—a man who had often, for a consideration, supplied the newscaster with information.

Hatch left Los Angeles at seven o'clock that night, instead of waiting till morning. His streamlined, supercharged roadster rocketed through Southern California like a cyclone, charging along the high-speed road that knifed from Vancouver to the Canal Zone. It was December, and grey dusk was darkening to night as Hatch turned into the private road that led to the concentration camp. He became aware of something amiss.

A siren was screaming hoarsely in the distant. Searchlights flared probingly into the skies. Hatch

slowed the roadster, peering into the gloom of the avocado groves that bordered the highway. His headlights made a white patch ahead.

Then he saw the motionless figure. Brakes screamed. A man was lying there, his clothing in rags, white hair bloodstained.

Hatch sprang out of the stopped car. He went to the prone man. Blood soaked the shirt, making it cling to the gaunt, bony chest. The newscaster caught his breath; his eyes narrowed. It was Manning—and not only had he been shot, but there were unmistakable signs of torture. . . .

Hatch shivered in the chill wind. He knelt beside Manning, opened the unconscious man's shirt, and felt suddenly nauseated at sight of the open wounds. Sirens screamed, coming closer.

The dying man opened his eyes—coldly gray, with a curiously penetrating stare. In the seamed, haggard face they appeared to glow with a light of their own. Their gaze examined Hatch probingly.

Manning reached up trembling, blood-damp hands, caught the newscaster's cheeks between them. His pale lips moved, but he could not speak. A trickle of blood crawled from the lax mouth.

And—the world went dark! Hatch was not to understand what had happened until much later; he seemed to be kneeling alone in utter blackness, with only two coldly shining points of fire far distant, watching—growing—

The eyes of the dying man . . .

They came closer. From them poured a flood of inexplicable force, energy that raced into Hatch's brain, shaking the very citadel of his mind. Then—the eyes were gone.

The darkness, too, had fled. Hatch blinked dazedly, looking down at

Manning—quite dead now, for the blood had ceased to flow, and no respiration lifted the hollow chest. The newscaster stood up. His cheeks felt clammy; the blood on them was evaporating in the snowy wind that blew down from Old Baldy Peak.

THE sound of running feet made Hatch start. He turned toward the roadster, and then paused. Hastily he lifted his hands above his head and stepped into the glare of the headlights.

Four men in the blue uniforms of the secret police sprang out of the darkness. They jerked to a halt; one lifted his gun. Another struck it down.

"Cut it! That isn't Manning!"

"Keep 'em up, buddy," the first guard growled, coming forward. He ran swift fingers over Hatch's clothing. "Okay."

"He's unarmed?" a new voice asked, low and incisive. Now Hatch made out a dwarfed figure crouching beside Manning's body, with a white blotch of a face twisted over his shoulder.

"Yes sir."

The figure arose and came forward. Hatch recognized Raymond Gerold, chief of the secret police, military arm of Commander Perrett. He was a spare, middle-aged fellow, with cool black eyes peering from under shaggy gray brows.

"Two of you—Peters, Feld—carry this—" He jerked his head at the corpse—"to the hospital."

They obeyed. Hatch stared at Gerold's grim face, leprously white in the blaze of the mercury-vapor headlights. A little breath of fear touched him. This man was all-powerful. . .

Gerold said crisply, "Who are you?"

Hatch explained and showed his

pass. "I came to see Doctor Manning." Involuntarily the glances of both men flickered to the roadside where the body had lain.

"Hatch—yes, I remember. The telecaster. What was the purpose of your visit?"

"It's my job to get news—"

"This isn't news. Manning was shot while attempting to escape. That's all. You will make no mention of it to anyone. Is that clear?"

Hatch nodded.

"Good. Now—was Manning alive when you got here?"

A little warning note tingled in the newscaster's brain. He shook his head. "I don't think so. He was dying—"

"Did he say anything?"

"No." Somehow Hatch felt that his denial lacked conviction. But after a moment Gerold's face relaxed in a tight smile.

"You are either truthful or very unwise. Under the circumstances, there's no point in your coming further, I think?"

"I guess not." It cost Hatch an effort to submit, but he was vividly conscious of the two guards flanking Gerold, their weapons ready. He got back into the roadster, turned it around with a snarling of gears. As the car gathered speed, he caught a glimpse of Gerold's face in the rear-view mirror, and whispered an oath through white lips.

"But what could I do?" he said aloud, with hopeless desperation. "They'd have killed me. And it wouldn't have helped, anyway. Damn it all!"

When he reached the main road, he turned south toward San Bernardino, only a few miles distant. He needed a drink. On the outskirts of the city he parked the car near a bar and entered the establishment.

It was almost empty. The bartender, a fat, moon-faced fellow, flicked a towel over the bar. "Yessir. What'll it be?"

"Scotch—double."

The man set out the drink. Hatch thought he heard the bartender say something, very softly.

His nerves were taut. He snapped, louder than he had intended, "All right, you'll get a tip! You don't have to ask for it."

The other's round eyes widened. He tried to speak, failed, and finally sputtered incoherent denial. Hatch felt a surge of irritation.

"Damn it, I heard you, didn't I?"

"But I didn't say anything—"

"He's right, mister," a new voice broke in. "You must be tighter than you look. He didn't say a word."

Hatch glanced aside at a lanky, grinning youth who sat a few stools away. Silently he finished his drink, and, regretting his outburst, put a bill on the bar and left. He thought he heard the bartender murmur an insult to his back, but ignored it.

A man stood just outside the door; another, a dwarfish figure, was moving swiftly away. For a moment Hatch thought he recognized Gerold, but in the dim light, he could not be sure. The other touched Hatch's arm. His face looked yellow in the gleam of the street-lamps, unhealthily pale, with pouches beneath the eyes and a black, bristling moustache. And he said, or seemed to say—for his lips did not move—

"I'd better frisk him. Gerold said he was unarmed, but he may have had a gun in the car."

The newscaster turned, staring in amazement. "What?"

THE man gave him a quick, odd glance. "Eh?" He flipped open his coat, showed the silver badge of

the secret police. "You're Hatch?" "Yeah."

"I've got orders to take you to Los Angeles."

Hatch's stomach seemed to drop away. It had been Gerold, then, lurking in the shadows. The agent was still talking, apparently, though his lips were immobile. Fragmentary murmurs...

"... he won't put up a scrap... careful, though... Gerold said... important as hell..."

And then, quite suddenly, with a queer, fantastic certainty, Hatch realized the incredible truth. He had become a telepath. He was reading the other man's mind.

Like an electric shock came the memory of Manning's death, and the moment when the world had been blotted out in darkness, when the dying man's eyes had—changed! What amazing thing had taken place then? What undreamed-of power had Manning implanted in the newscaster's brain?

Hatch asked slowly, tentatively, "Where's Gerold?"

"That doesn't matter," the agent said aloud, but his thoughts revealed more. Gerold had been waiting at the door of the bar. He had trailed Hatch from the concentration camp. Why?

No doubt he had become suspicious after the newscaster had driven away. Perhaps he had realized that Manning might have revealed the secret of telepathy. And the little scene in the bar room had shown him that he had been right.

Hatch's brain was a whirling turmoil of questions. The agent took his arm, urged him toward a black limousine at the curb. Hatch made no resistance; he knew it would be useless.

He relaxed on the cushions beside

the other, who meshed the gears and swung the car about. Glancing around, the newscaster saw another automobile trailing them closely. Gerold was taking no chances.

But—telepathy! It was incredible. How could Manning have managed to transmit the weird power in the fraction of a minute? Yet Hatch realized that he had the power to read minds, and, understanding that, he felt a curious little thrill. He had a defense, a weapon, that no other man in the world possessed.

He concentrated on reading the mind of his captor. There were words he seemed to hear soundlessly, intermingled with slashes of thought that were wordless, but were no less clear for that. And there were images, pictures—Gerold's face, a vision of a gun, and, ludicrously incongruous, a swift realization of a steaming cup of brown liquid, coffee. The thoughts flashing through the agent's mind were vividly clear to Hatch.

The newscaster decided that he could only read the ideas that passed through the other's mind from moment to moment. He could not probe into memory. That was beyond the threshold. Nevertheless, a few questions might give him some ideas. . .

"Where are you taking me?"

No answer. But the agent thought of Pasadena; he pictured a small white bungalow and a man standing before it. The man's face seemed blurred, shifting and changing, holding no recognizable features. Hatch guessed the agent had been told to drive to a certain rendezvous in Pasadena and meet a man there, but seemingly did not know who the latter was, or what he looked like.

Curiously he asked, "What's the camp like? Are the stories they tell about Gerold really true?"

Then he wished he hadn't asked. Thoughts and scenes of sickening brutality nauseated him. In the agent's mind he sensed disgust and repulsion; obviously he worked rather unwillingly under orders. Perhaps he might be open to a suggestion. . .

Hatch tried it. But the man was proof against bribery or any other appeals. He drove on in stony silence, and presently the car came into the outskirts of Pasadena. Then it halted before a small white bungalow—one Hatch recognized. A man was standing at the curb. He waved; the agent stopped the limousine and got out; the new arrival took the wheel. He sent the car out into the stream of traffic. Hatch scrutinized him.

He saw a moon-faced, bald fellow, peering nearsightedly through eyeball-fitting lenses, and simultaneously read the thought in the man's mind.

"How can I make it clear? If he knows nothing of science it may be difficult—"

"You might begin by telling me who you are," Hatch said. The other shot him a swift glance.

"Incredible! You can read my mind, eh?"

Hatch nodded.

"Well—well! Van Boren's my name. Gerold televised me—he wants me to explain things while we're heading for Los Angeles. I was to visit Manning tomorrow, but it seems he's dead."

A little shiver shook Hatch, but somehow he sensed that Van Boren was sincere—that his values were scientific rather than human, but that the man could, to some extent, be trusted.

THE moon-faced man guided the car under Pasadena Bridge's amber lights. "I know something of

Manning's work. I've been going through his papers . . . you should know something of this theory of his. It may help, later on. You know the brain sends a form of wave-energy through the neural tissue, eh? Good. Well, the nervous system is made up of anatomically independent units that are separated from each other by intervals—the synapses. A thought-impulse has to jump this synapse. Manning felt that if the waves could leap an infinitesimal gap, they could leap a much larger one. He contended that the electrical energy of the brain is broadcast from the body—and it's changed with thought—it's been proved that mental concentration alters the alpha rhythm."

"Like television," Hatch put in.

"Exactly like television! If the brain can be tuned in on the proper wave-length, telepathy will be an accomplished fact. Manning found out how to tune it in. Gerold said he talked—under torture, I suppose."

Van Boren thought, "Damn them! Killing a scientific genius like Manning!"

His round face giving no hint of his emotion, he went on. "No doubt you read my mind then. However, Gerold knows how I feel about such things. But I am very valuable to him, so I still live . . . Manning said the thing came to him suddenly, like a man learning how to swim. Or, rather, like a man who'd never opened his eyes suddenly learning how to use the muscles of his eyelids."

"He thought it'd be like that," Hatch said. "When I talked to him, he said he'd had glimpses of the—the 'wider vision.' But only glimpses."

"So. Well, Manning said he could impart the power telepathically, as he did to you tonight. The process couldn't be reversed. You can never

lose the ability now. But you can reveal the method to others, as Manning did to you."

"That's where you're wrong," Hatch grunted. "I don't know the trick."

"Manning didn't have time to tell you. I can help—that's my job. With my guidance you can, I think, rediscover how to impart the telepathic function."

"What's Gerold's plan?"

"I don't know," Van Boren said curtly. "But telepathy's a tremendous weapon—if its use is limited to America. Also, it's dynamite."

But Hatch read the scientist's mind. Van Boren, too, was wondering.

"Why did he insist on bringing this man to Los Angeles?" he was thinking. "Commander Perrett is on his way to the San Bernardino concentration camp. He wanted to get Manning's secret . . ."

So Perrett, autocrat of America, was coming west from Washington! And, apparently, Gerold didn't want Perrett and Hatch to meet. Why? There were cross-currents here—why hadn't Gerold arrested the telecaster personally? That would have been the logical course. Unless—unless Gerold, for some reason, feared Hatch would read his mind!

And the chief of the secret police did not want Hatch to meet Perrett. But Perrett was not used to having his wishes thwarted. When he learned the situation, he would come to Los Angeles and order Gerold to produce his captive. What if Gerold disobeyed?

He wouldn't dare. But he was clever, diabolically so. And many prisoners had been shot while trying to escape. . .

Suddenly Hatch knew that he faced death. His body crawled with cold

perspiration. He glanced back, saw an automobile's headlights not far away. A police car? They were approaching Glendale, a populous city near Los Angeles. Traffic became denser.

Hatch acted. He flung open the door at his side and leaped out, almost losing his balance as momentum carried his body forward. He heard a startled cry.

Lights flared into his eyes. He had already seen a taxi in the stream of traffic. He made for it, racing perilously through the jolting, grinding rush of automobiles. The taxi moved forward; Hatch made a desperate leap, felt his feet hit the running board. He gripped the door-handle with white knuckles and shouted at the driver.

"Get me out of here—quick! There's twenty bucks in it for you!"

A frowning face examined him. Hatch read the man's thoughts, said swiftly, "It's nothing illegal. Some guys are after me—"

"Okay, buddy. Hop in."

Van Boren was lumbering into sight. Beyond him uniformed men raced. The scientist leaped on the running-board, but Hatch thrust him away with a stiff-armed jab. The taxi swerved around the corner, and, picking up speed, roared through a dim-lit street.

"Think you can get away?" Hatch asked, his voice not quite steady.

"Sure. I know this burg like a book. Don't worry, fella."

HATCH wondered if the driver knew he was helping a captive escape from the secret police. But—he read the man's mind—there was no suspicion in it of the truth.

For a while Hatch concentrated on keeping his seat as the taxi whirled and raced intricately through Glen-

dale. Finally the driver said over his shoulder, "We've shook 'em. Where do you want to head?"

Where could he go? Not to his apartment, certainly. That would be fatal. Abruptly he thought of his secretary. He gave a Los Angeles address.

As the taxi rolled on, Hatch pondered. A queer thought came to him. The possessor of the telepathic function had almost the powers of a god. Power... a man might rule the world—rule it without despotism, cruelty or hatred.

No. One man could never guide Earth. It would need a colossus—a giant such as evolution had never produced. Against that thought Hatch weighed another. If Manning had revealed his secret to the world, what would have been the result? War?

Scarcely! The seeds of war are greed and selfishness and lust for power. With complete understanding, with all minds absolutely en rapport, the age-old curse of Mars would pass away. There would come in its place a truce...

Gerold's men would be combing the city by now. Van Boren—he had said the telepathic function could be transmitted. But how?

The taxi-driver was worrying about a traffic ticket he had received. The thought-thread broke, turned to contemplation of a long-delayed dinner awaiting him. Hatch tried to concentrate upon the fellow, but gave it up presently. There was some trick to the transmission of telepathy he didn't understand.

The taxi stopped. Hatch got out, paid the driver, and looked around quickly. No one was in sight. Above him loomed the moonlit tower of an apartment house. Hatch hurried inside.

Across the street, a man turned from a window and used the telephone.

Jean Hill lived on the seventh floor. Her door showed no crack of light beneath it. Hatch listened, touched the buzzer.

The door opened. A uniformed man stood on the threshold, a gun in his hand.

"Lift 'em," he snapped. "Quick!"

Sick hopelessness tightened Hatch's throat. He obeyed, stepped into the apartment at the other's command. Three other agents were standing there. Jean Hill was sitting on a couch, her face chalk-white.

Hatch smiled crooked. "Hello, kid," he said. "Didn't expect me at this time, did you?" Perhaps that would help to avert suspicion from the girl.

"Sit down," one of the agents said. Hatch read death in his mind. He complied.

Jean started to speak, but was peremptorily silenced. They waited for about ten minutes. Then the door opened and Commander Perrett entered.

He looked like Lincoln—a beardless, haggard Lincoln, with singularly gentle brown eyes. He wore a civilian suit of black that hung loosely on his gaunt frame.

"All right," he said quietly. "Take the girl to headquarters. Two of you remain on guard outside the door." Then he said nothing till he and Hatch were alone in the room. The newscaster stood up, his fingers moving nervously.

"Miss Hill had nothing to do with—"

"I know. She won't be harmed. I'll release her in a day or so. My business is with you, Mr. Hatch."

"Yeah?" The newscaster felt oddly

cold. "Well, I feel safer as your prisoner than as Gerold's."

Light flared in the brown eyes. "Raymond Gerold is my most faithful helper. You can gain nothing by such tactics. Why did you try to escape?"

"I was afraid of being killed," Hatch said frankly. "Like Manning."

"That was — regrettable. He shouldn't have escaped."

"Maybe he didn't like being tortured." Hatch was on dangerous ground, and he knew it. But Perrett's face went suddenly pale and haggard.

"They—he was tortured?"

"Horribly."

Perrett went to a window, peered out unseeingly. "God! When will this stop? If you fools would only obey!" His heavy shoulders shook. Hatch felt a breath of amazement.

He pressed his advantage. "You're the one to stop it, aren't you?"

Perrett turned. "I know. But a thistle must be grasped firmly . . . let me explain myself, Hatch." The autocrat's face was suddenly fanatical. "For hundreds of years America has been a failure. Democracy is valueless. As long as men are what they are, they need a strong hand to guide them. And rule them."

"Do they want it?"

"That doesn't matter! All this cruelty and bloodshed will be finished soon. Revolt must be wiped out. In ten years—five—America will be a Utopia. You think I'm a power-mad dictator. The world thinks so. It isn't pleasant for me." The deep voice grew harsh. "But I am nothing. I'm the scalpel that cuts out cancerous growths from humanity. Don't you imagine I'd like to live a normal life? Well—I can't. Mankind has always needed a leader—a leader to hammer it on the anvil!

When I die, America will be my monument, a nation without liberty, but with justice for all!"

And Hatch, reading the man's mind, knew that he was sincere. Perrett followed his ideals—followed them blindly into a chaos of bloodshed and terror!

"You mentioned Gerold. I tell you this; when I die Gerold will be my successor. He's hated because of the work he does—must do. But that work will be finished soon. Gerold will carry on my work, and bring all Earth under his rule. Only then will there be peace and happiness on this planet." Perrett's eyes were weirdly luminous. "I am dying now. The doctors have given me a little more than a year to live. But before I die, America will have its weapon—telepathy."

Hatch opened his mouth to speak, felt a surge of hopelessness. He could say nothing to this man. Words would be useless against the impregnable armor of fanaticism.

Perrett said, "So you must do as I wish. Van Boren will help. You won't be harmed—I will not permit unnecessary violence. But you must obey! Even torture . . . if there is no other way." He hesitated, asked, "Well? Do you see now?"

"Yeah," Hatch said. "All right. I'll do what you want."

THIRTY-FOUR hours later Hatch stumbled on the secret. Caffeine tablets had kept him awake, shirtless and perspiring, his mental processes probed mercilessly by the keen questions of Van Boren. They were in an office on the twentieth floor of Headquarters, overlooking Los Angeles.

And, suddenly, Hatch knew that he had discovered Manning's method. Quite simple—yet it could not be de-

scribed, any more than a color can be described to a man blind from birth. Concentrating, rigid with strain, Hatch abruptly realized that he could transmit the telepathic function. Though he did not attempt the experiment, he had a queer certainty that he had at last found the answer to the problem.

He leaned back in his chair, smiling wanly with pale lips.

"Got it, Van Boren. I've got it!"

The scientist mopped his bald head. His eyelids were red and inflamed. "Good Lord! You're sure? How—"

"I can't explain it. I just—know. I could make you a telepath right now. I'm certain of that."

Van Boren stood up, swaying with weariness. Hatch read his mind.

"Got to tell Gerold. He's waiting . . ."

"Wait a minute!" Hatch said sharply. "Get Perrett. He's the man I want to see."

Without answering, Van Boren went out, locking the door. Hatch went unsteadily to a desk and poured a drink. He downed it with a shudder. His head was aching horribly, and there was a tight dry feeling behind his temples. Gerold, he knew, had ordered Van Boren to report directly to him, not to Perrett.

And presently Gerold came in. He locked the door behind him and put his hand unobtrusively on his holstered gun. "You've got it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then telepathize me."

Hatch hesitated. He was reading Gerold's mind. And many things were clear to him now.

Perrett had been a fanatic—but an honest one. Gerold was neither. Thoughts raced through the man's brain, jumbled, vivid, triumphant. One idea stood out above all the

others, as though written on Gerold's forehead in letters of fire.

Power!

Power to rule America—to rule the world! And with no light hand! Hatch realized that Gerold hated Perrett, despised him for his ideals. He knew that more than once the chief of the secret police had planned to assassinate the autocrat and take the reins of government into his hands.

And on that day liberty in America would cease indeed. A despot would rule, with the mad selfishness of a Caligula, the monstrous appetites of an Augustus. Gerold would be the only man who knew the secret of telepathy—for he intended to kill Hatch as soon as he had acquired the power of reading minds.

Now it was clear why Gerold had avoided the newscaster until this moment. Hatch would never betray his secrets (Gerold thought); dead men are dumb.

Hatch looked at the gun. There was one chance—a nearly hopeless one. He took it.

"I—I—" He let his voice fade, and went down in a heap. Through slitted eyes he watched the other.

Gerold stood silent. He thought, "Is he shamming? Van Boren said he's exhausted. I've got to hurry. Before Perrett finds out . . ."

The agent drew his gun. Holding it, he knelt beside the newscaster.

Hatch shot out his left hand. It closed on a cold steel barrel. He surged up; for a second the two men were face to face, straining for possession of the revolver. Gerold's fingers stabbed at the other's eyes.

Hatch swung his fist in a vicious arc. It smashed against Gerold's jaw. The agent was driven back. He gathered himself, still gripping the gun.

Again Hatch's fist lashed out. Gerold went down and stayed unmoving.

The newscaster put the weapon in his pocket. He went to the door, unlocked it, opened it a crack. No one was outside.

WITH an assumption of carelessness, Hatch stepped out into the hall. A guard was lounging by a window thirty feet away. Hatch walked toward him quickly. His head was throbbing with a sick, blinding headache.

The guard looked up sharply. Hatch said, "Where's Commander Perrett? He wants to see me right away. Important."

There was a silent scrutiny. "Okay." The man put out his hands to frisk Hatch, but the newscaster forestalled him.

"I know the rules." His smile cost him an effort. "Left hand pocket."

The other grunted, took possession of the gun. "All right. Come along."

They went to an elevator, and emerged three floors above. Together they went along a brightly-lit corridor. The guard pointed to a door at the end. "That's it—"

A voice shouted, "A prisoner has escaped! Shoot him on sight! Description follows—"

The guard moved swiftly, but Hatch was faster. He hit the man on the point of the jaw as he wrenched at his gun, and put all his strength in the blow. Without waiting to see the result, Hatch sprinted along the passage. He gripped a door-handle, felt it snatched out of his hand. Beyond his shoulder Hatch saw Perrett rising from a desk, his face startled.

"Stop!" Perrett cried. "Don't shoot him!"

The guard holstered his weapon.

"Let him in."

Hatch said, "Better have him

guard the door. Gerold's out to kill me.'

"Search him . . . nothing? All right. Stand guard outside."

The agent obeyed. Hatch moved toward the desk, and Perrett put his hand on a gun. "Well?"

"I've found the secret. Gerold wanted it for himself. He plans to kill you—I read his mind."

Perrett's gaunt face twitched. "It won't work, Hatch. Your bluff's no good." He moved toward a buzzer.

"Wait!" Hatch was thinking quickly. "You don't believe me. You think Gerold's as sincere as you are. You haven't seen the greed and lust for power in his brain. Okay. I'm here to give you what you want, Perrett—the telepathic function."

"Yes?"

"But first I've got something to say. You're going to listen to me. If you don't I'll manage to kill myself, somehow, and you'll never learn the secret. Is it a bargain?"

Perrett nodded. "Very well. I'll listen, of course."

Hatch chose his words carefully, despite the flaming ache in his head. "You're sincere. So were the Spanish torturers when they burned heretics to save their souls. Gerold isn't sincere. He knows that if telepathy spreads over the world, he's doomed, like the rest of his kind. Have you ever read Stuart Chase? Back in 1938 he wrote a book called *The Tyranny of Words*. He didn't foresee telepathy as the solution, but he faced a vital problem squarely. Chase knew that the thing that's wrecking civilization is failure of understanding. No two men use the same word with the same meaning."

"What does Christianity mean to you? Ruthlessness. The death of a thousand men to save the world. Christianity means something else to

to every man. No two people use the same word with the same meaning, the same referent. Words without referents have caused all the wars and hells that ever existed on Earth—emotional catchwords, Perrett! Patriotism — fascism — capitalism! Meaningless! Meaning something different to everybody."

Hatch was nearly blind with the throbbing agony against his temples.

"Man's a pawn today, his emotions swayed by propaganda and psychology. Dictators hide their real motives, their lust for tyranny and power, behind a mask. Or else they're blind fanatics. Telepathy will rip away that mask. When a war is declared, it'll be easy enough to find out who's responsible, and why. Back in 1918, if the world had been telepathized, how long do you suppose that hell would have lasted? Germans were told by propagandists they were fighting to save the Fatherland. The same sort of vicious propaganda sent Americans to France. The same thing's happening today. Men are learning to hate the Eastern Commune—why? Because they don't understand it. The Orient hates us—for the same reason. All Earth's plunging down to a holocaust, as it did seventy years ago, for the same reason — misunderstanding. That's why I say—it won't happen again!"

Perrett's face was terrible. He tried vainly to speak. Hatch flung up a restraining hand.

"You want the secret of telepathy—well, take it!"

A blaze of unearthly power seemed to rush from Hatch's eyes. Using his newly-discovered strength, he sent the telepathic function surging into Perrett's brain.

MANNING had bequeathed the gift to Hatch. Now the news-

caster shared it with Perrett. For a long moment the frightful tension, then Hatch relaxed, staggering against the desk. Perrett put up a faltering hand to his forehead.

"I—"

"You needn't talk," Hatch thought silently. "I can hear your mind, and you can hear mine. You and I are equal now—except for one thing. I can give the telepathic power—and I didn't tell you how to do that."

Perrett whispered, "God! I can read your mind—yes!"

"Then read what I saw in Gerold's brain. Thoughts don't lie. Can you see inside Gerold now, as I did?"

Perrett's eyes were glazed. "You're bluffing," he forced out through white lips. "Not Gerold. Not—"

"Go to him," Hatch's mind said. "Find him. Read his brain. Then look at this monument you're leaving. See how pretty it is, built on the bones of dead men. And see what Gerold plans to do to that wonderful monument of yours!"

Silently Perrett went to the door. He looked back over his shoulder, and, reading his mind, Hatch saw hell. Then he went out. Glancing down at the desk, the newscaster realized that the gun was gone.

He followed Perrett into the hall, heard the elevator door click shut.

An audiophone bellowed, "This is important! A prisoner has escaped. Shoot him on sight. Shoot to kill."

Halfway down the passage Hatch saw the limp figure of the guard he had knocked unconscious. A revolver lay beside him.

If he could escape now—go into the city and share his power with others—tell them the secret, and let them pass it on to their fellow-men. Telepathy couldn't be stopped then. It would spread out over California,

over America, over the world! Nothing Perrett or Gerold could do would halt the inexorable tide. And Earth would be liberated. . . .

But Hatch hadn't realized his weakness. He took a few steps, and his knees buckled. He fell in a crumpled heap, nearly screaming with the grinding agony of his brain. He could not stand up, but slowly he dragged himself toward the guard.

Fifteen feet to go—ten—five—

The man was moving.

Hatch doubled up helplessly for a moment, the world blanketed in a veil of red-shot darkness.

The guard awoke. He saw Hatch.

The newscaster shot out his hand in a desperate attempt to reach the gun. He was too late.

The guard kicked it out of reach. He pulled out his own weapon.

The audiophone thundered, "An escaped prisoner! Kill him on sight!"

Hatch dragged himself onward, sick and blind and deaf. The guard lowered his gun, squeezed the trigger.

A dead voice said, "Wait."

The elevator door was open, and Commander Perrett was coming out. Blood stained his shirt-front and trickled down the ill-fitting suit.

The guard dropped his weapon, staring at Perrett. He rocked on his feet, his eyes glazed.

"Hatch," he whispered.

The word, and the thought behind it, penetrated into the newscaster's numbed brain. He looked up, saw Perrett, and realized that he looked on a dying man. And with the dictator died the outworn rule of autocracy, and the seeds of war and fear and hatred.

"I have killed Raymond Gerold," he said to Hatch. "Now your secret belongs to the world."

THE TRAITOR by THOMAS S. GARDNER

Would Dr. Powers be a traitor if he deprived his country of a weapon to make it all-powerful in time of war, or was his first duty as a scientist to humanity?

THE park was almost deserted as the setting sun shone through the trees, picking out the statue that dominated the plaza. It was old and covered with a kind of verdigris that seemed to denote hoary age and a sense of far-off times. It towered above the shrubbery in its majestic size, and gave one a feeling of loneliness that even the tinkling fountains at its base could not dispel.

It was a strange statue and almost all of the visitors who came every day to loll in the sunshine in the park had forgotten or had never known its significance. Its base had been embellished with scenery. On one side many people could be discerned, some in the act of falling, some shaking their clenched fists as if in defiance, and others cowering in fear. One and all appeared to be directing their wrath or hatred toward the statue. It was a trick of engraving, of course, but it served. The rear gave a different scene. A city lay there, but a broken city. A fleet of planes hung over the city dropping bombs. Buildings were falling, debris from exploding shells hung in the air, a cloud of gas half obscured part of the city with the structures dimly seen through it, while craters gaped in the once-regular boulevards. Tiny figures could be seen lying on the ground. A pall of death hovered like a blanket over the city.

The other side pictured desolation. Blackened fields, shell holes, and the

dead littered the earth. In one corner a woman crouched over the body of a child dying of starvation. Its tiny ribs had been accentuated and its cadaverous skull shrieked hunger.

The front of the pedestal consisted of a quartz window. Back of this reposed a single sheet of paper. It was yellowed with age, although it had been preserved in an atmosphere of nitrogen. Faintly one could still trace out its message. It was cryptic and stood as a symbol. Was it an accusation or a vindication?

The statue itself had been faithfully cast. Its makers had been honest there. They had been leaving to the ages to judge. Its subject was simple. It was a stoop-shouldered man with a kindly face, albeit sorrowful if viewed in profile. There was nothing extraordinary about him. A simple legend read:

DR. ALEXANDER POWERS THE GREAT TRAITOR

The statue had been erected after the Second War of the East, when the country had partially recovered from the defeat of that grim conflict—but it had finally lost, and the terrible burden of war indemnities had wrecked it financially as well as politically. Some said that the statue was a warning and pointed accusing fingers at it, while others had said that Powers was a martyr, and not a traitor. But only posterity could decide—and posterity had forgotten.

"SO YOU won't give us the formula!" stormed the little General. Angrily he strode up and down the laboratory, stepping around the pieces of apparatus strewn about.

His verbal opponent was a stoop-shouldered, mild-mannered man. For hours now, they had been at it, pleading, begging, and at last descending to threats to make him tell the secret of the strange power that had almost wrecked the government testing laboratories the day before.

"But General," he pleaded, "it's too dangerous! You know what happened here yesterday. Can't you see that we can't control it?"

"Enough!" roared the harassed General. "You admit that only one of these new weapons would check the advance of the enemy and give the victory to us. And you, you . . ." he almost choked in his fury. "You, whom the government had trusted and given this vast laboratory to, now you refuse us aid! Don't you realize that if we do not turn the tide, the city will fall and our cause will be lost?"

"You forgot the X-gas that held them back until we could prepare," countered the little man, "and the super-U explosive that is more powerful than liquid nitroglycerine that I turned over three months ago."

"Yes, yes, man! I understand all that! But our need is desperate! What if it does start adjacent matter to disintegrate? We can stop it after we win the war.

The little man was on the point of collapse. He would give his life for his country—but not this horrible weapon that ate away matter itself. He shuddered as there appeared before his eyes a picture of the earth decomposing and breaking up!

"Very well," replied the little sci-

entist, apparently seeing the futility of further argument and giving in. "Give me a sheet of paper."

The General's eyes lighted up. It had been easy, after all. These thinkers feared pain. If he had been sure of that sooner, much time could have been saved.

The little man wrote while the General sauntered around the room, a satisfied look upon his face. These were the words on the paper:

"My dear General:

"I have a duty that is greater than that to my country. It is my duty to Mankind.

"This weapon would have won the war—but for whom? It cannot be controlled and the Earth would have been destroyed so that life could no longer exist on it. It is too big for us, this force I have discovered.

"The people of my country will hate me for what I am about to do, but their children's children will bless me. What does it really matter who wins this war? You and I know that it was made by a small group to advance their own selfish interests. In a few years it will be forgotten anyway. I cannot sacrifice Mankind for an ideal. My life, it is nothing—Mankind is everything. My dear General, you and I are but cogs in a machine. We just happen to think differently and believe in different things. When you are groaning under the yoke of the conquerors, just remember that Man still goes on.

"Dr. Alexander Powers."

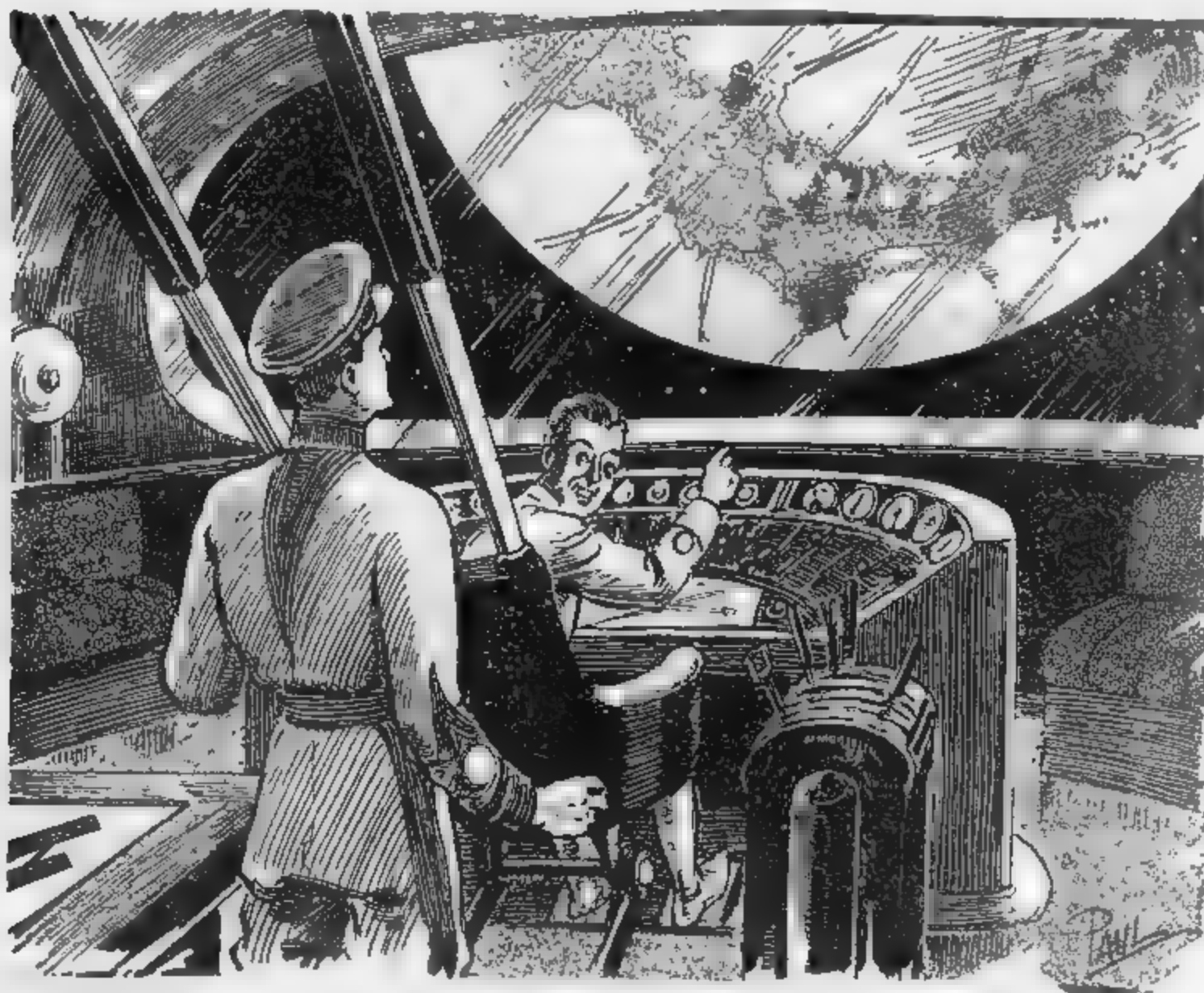
HE WAS tired—very tired. The General was coming now. Triumph lighted up his features and he smiled. Strangely enough, the little scientist smiled back.

Then he raised the glass to his lips and drank deeply.

THE BLACK COMET

by JOHN COLERIDGE

Captain Moor was called mad, because he dared to brave the limitless expanse of interplanetary space!—He led his crew, like a Columbus of the void, to the alien world of Mars and a series of weird adventures!



"There she is, Captain!" he shouted at me.

MOST of the passengers were in their cabins and asleep. It was well past the third hour of the night-period. Bob Andrews leisurely made his way along the A-corridor. He was heading for the lounge salon of the main deck. Perhaps some passenger was still up, with whom he might chat—any way, anything but sleep. He had had too much of it since the ship left Mars.

The young officer quickened his

pace. He was passing the corridor intersection. Bob Andrews suddenly felt the cold steel of a gun in the small of his back. He stopped short at the command of a gruff voice. For a brief second a shuddering thrill ran through him. Was the ship being taken over by spacateers? Such a thing had not happened in the spaceways for years!

He was ordered into cabin M42. The door stood partly ajar.

It appeared to Bob Andrews that

the man was laboring for breath, as if from violent exertion, or as if mortally wounded and gasping for air. He wondered what all this meant as he entered M42.

A moment later he heard the door being bolted behind him. He was ordered to turn around.

Bob Andrews gasped and his eyes dilated from startled shock. Before him stood an Osatar, red skin half hidden by his covering of soft white hair. The face was almost human and denoted intelligence. This man of Mars had long tentacles instead of arms. From each shoulder socket a pair of them hung almost to the floor. They twisted and quivered like serpents.

The earthman shuddered, but not at the sight of the familiar Osatar. On the floor, sprawled in death, lay the body of a Red-devil. It was typically brilliant red of skin, devoid of hair, and with taloned and webbed hands and feet. The face was satanic and leering.

It was the first Red-devil from the Kouun Basin that Bob Andrews had ever seen. His racing mind tried to account for the savage monster's presence aboard a spaceship. Such a thing had seldom been reported before.

The Osatar supplied the information, huskily: "Smuggled out of the Kouun Basin by someone who . . . who is my enemy . . . to murder me. Hid in the ship when it left Mars . . . attacked me tonight. I killed him."

Bob Andrews saw the gaping knife wound in the Red-devil's chest. A pool of green-tinted blood had trickled to the floor.

The two men stared at each other. The Martian was about to speak again when he wavered. His body trembled. One of the tentacles

grasped a chair for support. Another groped in a pocket of his tunic and brought forth a packet. With a shaking tentacle it was tendered to the earthman.

"Take this," the Osatar said, "and guard it with your life. On it are directions . . . destination . . . deliver it." The gruff voice trailed off to a husky whisper: "Deliver it . . . without fail!"

The alien creature was slowly sinking to the floor. The young officer could see death in its glassy green eyes. He leaped forward to give aid. A tentacle waved him away.

"I die," hissed the Martian. "It is too late . . . my enemy succeeded. . . ." A curling tentacle touched the raw knife wound at the throat, from which thick green blood welled, soaking the tunic. "I die . . . but Mad Moor. . . . Mad Moor lives! . . . packet . . ."

The Martian crumpled to the floor—dead.

The young ship's officer stood as if transfixed. He could scarcely believe the last words that had fallen from the lips of the Osatar. Mad Moor alive! Could it be possible when a universe had mourned him as dead for nearly a quarter century! His hand trembled as his eyes stared at the mysterious packet.

When Bob Andrews left M42 to make the formal report of the double death, the packet was well hidden inside his shirt, next to his skin. Should he confide in Bill and Dick? He pondered that question gravely as he made his way forward.

THE Blue Star settled as lightly as a feather in its cradle. With a slight bump, it came to rest. It lay amidst the mass of metal spars like some unknown creature from

an uncharted sea. The many faceted sides of its great steel body scintillated in the rays of the setting sun. From the many opened ports streamed the passengers. It was like a swarm of ants about a goose egg.

From a port near the stern of the space-liner stepped three young officers, arm in arm. They were resplendent in their uniforms of green leather and shining silver braid. They, in common with other spacemen of this year of 2275, had the grace and strength of well-trained athletes.

Bob Andrews dragged his two companions along. His eyes reflected eagerness. He paid no attention to the questions they deluged him with. In their haste, they collided with an officer who had just stepped from an elevator coming up from the city outlet of this giant cradle station. The officer staggered back before recovering balance.

The three young officers jumped to stiff attention and saluted when they saw who it was. Commander Knowlton eyed them sternly as he straightened his coat.

"Hell-larking no sooner a ship cradles," the words crackled out. "By Jupiter, I'll be at the next Solar Assizes and see if I can put a stop to this sort of foolishness."

He whirled on his heels and stamped for the main landing.

"The old walrus," growled Dick when the Commander was out of ear-shot. "Just because we're hurrying."

"And just why are we hurrying?" queried Bill. He addressed his question to Bob Andrews, as they entered an elevator.

Bob snapped the switch for the

ground level. It wasn't till they reached it that he answered.

"You'll know when we get to my apartment. After that, I'll wager we'll be off on the keenest adventure of our lives. It'll be twice the thrill of our first assignment to Venus."

Again with two arms about his companions' shoulders, he dragged them along to the nearest tube-lane.

In the secrecy of his apartment, soundproof from casual ears, Bob Andrews told his two friends that part of the story not entered in his official report. He told of the packet, and of the dying Martian's last words.

"Mad Moor?" exploded Bill. "The Mad Moor history refers to?"

He and Dick looked at each other breathlessly. Mad Moor! He was the hearts' hero of every young officer in the Solar System!

"Undoubtedly the same," nodded Bob. "He was the first man to take a spaceship beyond the moon and return, in 2220. Sixteen years old at the time! And I thought I was good in becoming a commissioned spaceman at eighteen. Six years after the pioneer space trip to the moon, he blasted to Mars and back. And then for nearly a quarter-century he blazed trails throughout the Solar System. His adventures were more fantastic than those old fairy tales we have heard about. It took iron nerves and red-blooded courage to fly the old rocket ships they had over a half century ago. Imagine landing a huge steel ship like they had with rocket blasts, and on strange satellites and planets to boot. Today, with the Eco Cradles,* anyone with a little technical training can land a ship. But Mad Moor sailed the void when there were no Eco Cradles,

only harsh rocks and solid ground to land on.

"Mad Moor they called him, because he took no thought of the great odds against him in those first days of solar exploration. When he had opened almost every possible lane of interplanetary travel, and had nothing to do but watch others follow in his pioneering footsteps, he disappeared for three years. He was thought dead, wrecked in space. He came back, though, to organize the famous SSS** when spaceteers began robbing freighters and endangering the safety of space-travel."

"We know all that," said Bill impatiently.

"Yes," echoed Dick. "What about Captain Moor—and the packet?"

"This packet is to be delivered to him."

"That Osatar must have been insane," said Bill. "Captain Moor is dead!"

"That has never been confirmed. He vanished about twenty-five years ago. History tells us he was out Pluto-way on the trail of the illusive spaceteer who marauded the space lanes with his mystery ship, the Silver Dart. Nothing has been heard or seen of either one since that day. Whether it had been a fight to the finish, or whether Mad Moor chased the spaceteer clear out of the Solar System, no one knows except perhaps this Martian who gave me the packet."

"Crazy, I tell you," scoffed Bill.

"We're going to pay Captain Moor

a visit tonight!" returned Bob. "If he's really alive."

Dick's "What!" and Bill's "How!" were shouted together.

"Here, look at this." Bob, for the first time, exhibited the soiled and sealed packet. Neatly stenciled on its face was a position corresponding with a Wacon Chart.† They had merely to fly a stratosphere ship blind till the red and green lights of the highly efficient chart were identical. This would bring them to the exact point of the destination stenciled on the packet.

"Well, are you with me, lads?" asked Bob.

But the question was unnecessary. Dick and Bill were already tugging at his arm.

IT WAS two hours later that the three officers of the Blue Star were in the snug cabin of a rocket-bus, blasting toward the stratosphere. Below them, the metropolis was a blur of light fading away minutely, until it vanished completely. Soon the rocket blasts on the stern plates drummed at forty miles altitude.

According to swiftly taken calculations, they found that their ship was heading for the Rocky Mountains. So it was in the fastness of this desolate region that the almost-mythical Captain Moor was supposedly hidden—the Mad Moor whose disappearance a quarter-century before had been clothed in utter mystery.

The swift descent of the rocket-bus was checked in the denser air as huge wings unfolded automatically.

* Eco Cradles—a closely guarded secret of the government of the United Nations of Earth. Arthur Eco, famous scientist and inventor, built his first counter-gravity cradle in 2245. Its success was instantaneous. It made Earth queen of the Solar System. Tonnage became an insignificant matter, and Earth, with its huge spaceships of war and commerce, was able to conquer and colonize all the planets.

** SSS—Solar System (patrol) Service.

† Wacon Chart—the universally used robot pilot. For planetary or interplanetary use, it automatically took account of wind pressure, gravity, relative motion, and any other forces existent.

Without a sound, and with powerful landing lights playing on the sward below, Bob landed the ship.

They found themselves about a quarter-mile from the only habitation in this wilderness. The lighted windows gleamed from the grove of trees that sheltered it. With trepidation, the three approached. It was an antiquated log cabin, the like of which they had seen only in their history books.

Bob Andrews, a few paces in the lead, rapped upon the heavy oak door. From within rumbled a voice, in a crescendo of power, bidding them to come in. Bob turned the latch. The three of them stood hesitant on the threshold. Their hearts, pounding, their eyes staring, they found themselves speechless. Thirty paces before them stood the Mad Moor!

Eighty-odd years he was, when the three officers of the Blue Streak first saw this famous adventurer. Time and age it seemed had taken some toll of this giant of muscle and bone. The deeply etched lines of his face and the matted gray hair all bespoke old age. One of his ears was missing entirely. The parts of his body that were visible were all a mass of scars and welts of hundreds of healed wounds.

COLD, piercing eyes surveyed them—eyes that seemed to burn to the core of their brains. And then, the hard, stern face, which seemed like carved marble, broke into a smile.

"C-men*, eh! What line?" The

voice rumbled like thunder. In the massive neck played cords of sinew.

Bob Andrews sprung to attention and saluted. "Blue Line, sir, Mars, Venus and Ganymede. Passenger."

"Good line. I sailed their first ship back in 2234. Mars-way it was. But come in; come in, lads! It gets cold here in the mountains at night. Come over here to the fire and sit down."

Captain Moor led the way to a great open fireplace in which logs were blazing. They seated themselves on a long leather couch before it.

It seemed to the three C-men that they had suddenly been turned back in time. Such an atmosphere as they were in had only been read of in their ancient-history books. The thrilling ecstasy of it made their blood tingle.

Captain Moor leaned against a side of the stone fireplace. He regarded them in silence for a moment. This intrusion had been as great a surprise to him as it had been to them. But his keen mind was working rapidly.

"Then Ruk-Sara is dead." His eyes bored into those of Bob Andrews. He had picked him out as the spokesman.

"How . . . how did you know, sir?"

"Because, lad, he was the only living person who knew this place. And while he was living no other mortal would know of it. I knew my men, lads, and Ruk I knew best of all. He was my first mate. But I'm forgetting my manners. I always was short on them, by the Tarps of Titan! A fighting man and manners don't mix no-how. And I've always stuck to those principles. Here," and he reached to a table be-

* The word pilot died with the installation of Eco Cradles on the satellites and planets throughout the Solar System. The men who maneuvered the space-ships were known as Chart-men or C-men in Chart-rooms or C-rooms in the core of the ships. The ships were flown entirely blind because of the efficiency of the Wacon charts and the Eco Cradles.

hind him and handed them a large glass beaker.

"Here is some old Yanson ale, and I'll wager its like isn't drunk on the spaceways today." Each of the young men took a drink. The powerful liquid burned to the very tips of their toes.

"We had to have strong drinks back in the days when I sailed. It meant a lot sometimes and more than once saved our lives. It's made from Yanson, the black wheat of Venus. A quart of it is as good as a meal to a strong man. But I can see by your eyes that you lads are thirsting for other things . . ."

Bob Andrews arose. From his tunic he drew the packet. "I almost forgot, sir," he said as he handed it to Captain Moor.

The man of a thousand space-voyages reached for it. His hand trembled a little. He tore it open and read. The only sound in the vast room was the crackling of the burning logs. As he finished, his fists clenched. His eyes gleamed strangely. On his lips was a grim smile of triumph.

"It's done!" He turned his face to the youths. "Lads, tonight Mad Moor's soul has been freed. And this packet done it. Ask of me what you will and I'll grant it. Wealth, anything at all. Speak up, lads." The last was like a sharp command.

"If it's all the same to you, sir..."

"Damn the sir, call me Captain. I like it better."

"Captain, then," Bob Andrews continued. "We would just like to have you tell us of your adventures out in space. . . ."

Mad Moor laughed thunderously. "Lad, that would not take one night, but a thousand nights. If you'll promise not to reveal my hiding place, or that I am still alive—to the

universe I must remain dead!—visit me as often as you can, but in secrecy, and I'll tell you tales no story-book contains. But by the horned Jooras, I haven't learned your names." He pointed from one to the other. "Bob, Dick, and Bill." He repeated as each gave his name. "I get lonesome sitting by the fire. I'll be looking forward to your visits. What is your run now, Bob?"

"Mars-way, Osatasageez."

"Good. My first tale then will start with Osatasageez. It was, incidentally, my first port of call beyond the moon in that memorable year of 2226. I was pilot at the time on a freighter for Kensley Luna Mines, Inc., and tough sailing it was in those days. No Eco cradles, no Electro-repulsion screens, no Wacon charts, no Dulco steel hulls, and the pilot sat up forward. He blasted-off and landed blasting. No C-men or C-rooms in those days. But pilots they called us. And as hell-larking a bunch of rascals we were as ever left earth. A lot of them painted the craters of the moon red with their blood, and as many died en route. Meteors, engine trouble, mutiny and what not."

PART TWO

MAD MOOR'S STORY

I WAS just turning twenty-two then, full of life and bigger and stronger than most men at that age. My blood was on fire. I wanted to know what lay beyond the moon. The earth people had been sending ships to the moon for twenty odd years, mining its precious metals. It brought a new order of things, this tremendous wealth from Luna. Poverty became a thing of the past. Peace and amiability grew among

the nations. It brought a new culture. Earth was conquering space! She was the sovereign of the Solar System. Her peoples were proud of it and formed a glorious union of nations.

There were others before me who likewise felt as I did. Pioneers, adventurers, call them what you will. Space swallowed them in its silent mystery and none ever returned. That, however, did not discourage me. I was young, impetuous and I had a mind of my own.

So on a spring morning in the year 2226, I stormed into the private office of old man Kensley. I was mad as a bull. I was fed up with the monotonous grind of piloting a ship to the moon and back. I was determined to have my way or quit them flat. I had a reputation, too! And mind you, I was to blast-off that same night for the moon with a cargo of supplies.

The old man seemed startled when I rushed in. I must have had a mean look on my face. He stopped puffing his big cigar and just stared at me. He expected fireworks, all right.

"What's . . . what's the matter, Moor?" he finally asked in a whisper.

"Plenty," I shouted. "Look here, Kensley; I'm fed up on this racket and somebody else can take the old crate Moon-way tonight."

"You can't do. . . ."

"Who says I can't? I'll do anything I damn please," I stormed back at him.

"All right, all right. But listen, Moor; give me a break. Becker is sick, Lamson is getting married, and there isn't a relief pilot in the whole country. The supplies have to be there by the eighteenth. You can't let me down like that! Now tell me what all this is about and I'll prom-

ise you a square deal. What's eating you all of a sudden?"

"I want to go Mars-way," I growled.

Old man Kensley leaped to his feet. He showed fire now. "You're mad, Moor!" He thundered at me.

I fired right back at him. "Give me a ship. Let me outfit it and pick my own crew, and by the Jeets of Luna, I'll show you who is mad! I'll go there and I'll come back." My determination had some effect on Kensley. He sat down at his desk and puffed his cigar. His eyes bored into mine.

"All right, Moor. For once in my life, I spoke too soon. But I've always kept my word. I'll give you a square deal. On one condition, though; the supplies must leave tonight." His jaws clamped tight.

"I'll blast-off tonight."

"Good." The old man grunted. "When you come back, I'll have a ship ready for you—the new one just being completed. The Black Comet."

I must have leaped into the air like a madman the way old Kensley stared at me. I was wild with joy. Let them call me mad. I was determined to gamble my neck that it could be done.

"It's going to set me back a smart sum, Moor," the old man said after a while. He stroked his chin. "On the other hand, you've earned a lot for me too. I guess I won't miss too much."

"Kensley, I'll triple any sum you put into this venture. I'll come back with something if I have to rob the Martians. The Earth has taken a fortune from Luna. There is no telling what wealth the major planets might possess. It is worth the gamble, isn't it?"

"Up to a certain point, Moor—because if you don't come back I'll lose

the best spaceman and pilot that ever blasted-off." Kensley held out his hand and I gripped it firmly. I couldn't say a word. I hadn't expected that. I turned and fled from the office. . . .

Ninety-eight days, that first trip took us. We got off our course somewhere out in that infernal blackness. Twice my men were ready to mutiny, but Tex and I kept them in their places with threats and curses. Tex Roney was my first mate then—a raw-boned six-footer who would have gone to hell with me if I'd steer the ship there.

With black despair in our hearts, we roared on into space. We constantly checked our course to see just where we had made a mistake. For days we fought on. For days we were lost in that limitless space beyond the moon. Lost! Lads, you'll never know what a feeling it is to be lost out there until you've experienced it. The nearest thing to it is like a condemned man awaiting his hour of execution.

I WAS at the charts one day when Tex let out a yell. I leaped into the pilot-room where he sat at the controls.

"There she is, Captain, to the right of us and as pretty a sight as I'll ever want to see." He shouted at me. I looked. Sure enough it was Mars! Like a rusty ruby she hung in the blackness. But we were hitting at a sharp tangent. Without a word, I pulled Tex from the controls. This was a matter I alone could handle—and then for nearly three days, I sat constantly at the controls with only short snatches of sleep. I had to fight the Black Comet to bring it into its course.

We landed at night. I had all lights blazing and every man at his

post. Believe me lads, I blasted a cradle that night in the red sands of Mars. We stove in a storage compartment but not another scratch. We had landed safely on Mars!

The next morning found us all up early. Tex and I made atmospheric observations and found that we could live in the air of Mars. I detailed part of the crew to repair the stoved-in storage compartment. In its damaged state, I wouldn't dare take the ship into space. Tex and four men were sent out to look around and size things up. It was fun to watch them when they started off.

The men, in their eagerness to be away, started off in a brisk walk. The result was tragic. They bounded into the air, lost their balance, and came down sprawling in the sand. Tex gave us the biggest laugh. His long legs had an extra snap to them. Up he went, somersaulting, and came down head first. He sat up cursing and spitting sand.

When the fun was over I shouted to them to follow my instructions. The method I had taught them en route. They arose with a sheepish grin on their faces and obeyed me. Using a sliding gait, similar to wading in water, they did quite well.

We had landed in a sort of crater some two hundred feet in depth. It was almost circular, its diameter being approximately two earth miles. The sides of the crater were formed of a crystalline rock, the sharp, jagged peaks of which rose up straight from its base. At only one point was there an exit—a ragged fissure in the circumjacent wall of rock. The opening looked like a battered breach in the wall of a fortress. What lay beyond, none of us knew. It was towards this only exit I had sent Tex and his men.

The damage done to the storage compartment was worse than I had anticipated. I soon realized that it would take several days of hard work before it would be completely repaired. I drove the men hard. I was eager to have it done. Days of exploration lay before us—besides, the thoughts of the return trip occupied my mind constantly. I was resolved to show the world it could be done!

We had labored about two hours. Crocker, the engineer, who was standing aloft, stopped his riveting and shouted down at me.

"Something is wrong, Captain—look!" I followed his pointing finger with my eyes. Across the level stretch of sand I saw Tex and his men coming towards us. By their tremendous leaps I could see that they were in a great hurry. Something was afoot! They were waving their arms and shouting.

When they came within hearing distance, we heard shout after shout of, "They're coming . . . they're coming. . ." and they kept rushing towards us in that mad leaping. It appeared as if they were flying. To us standing beside the ship, it was a grotesque sight. As they continued that insane shouting I belled at Tex, "Who's coming?"

"Red-devils!" He yelled back at me. "Hundreds of them . . . thousands of them!" The crew shrank back from me at the curses that thundered from my throat. Momentarily I was beserk. Had the heat gotten the best of them? Were they seeing things because of the strain they had been under since we had left earth? Was I to have madmen on my hands?

When Tex landed at my feet, breathless and sweating from every

pore, I grasped him by the shoulder and half spun him around.

"Take hold of yourself, lad," I commanded sternly. "This is no time for hell-larking. We've things to face here."

"Captain, you'll be facing more in an hour or so than you ever bargained for." He came back at me and rattled on while I stared at him. "There are thousands of them just over the ridge. They must have seen us come down last night. There is a city about six miles to the south of us and that's where they're coming from. I put my glasses on them. If they're not the nearest thing that ever spawned from hell, I'll eat the blasted ship. Captain, we're in for it and plenty!"

"Flying or riding?" I barked.

"Neither, captain, they're walking."

That made me feel better. I figured then and there that nothing short of a savage would walk in heat like we faced—and savages I could take care of, by the Jeets of Luna! I barked orders then. In less than a half-hour every man and all of our equipment was inside the ship. It was none too soon. Through the distant fissure in the ramparts of rock poured a solid mass of Martians. It was like a wave of red water pouring through a broken dike. Every man in the ship stood at an open port with a Woolson gun.

As they came nearer and I could distinguish them plainly, I realized that Tex had been right. I marveled that the planet Mars had spawned nothing better than these savages after its eons of evolution. Was I witnessing an inevitable doom that was to be the heritage of all mankind? Was evolution to reach a certain pinnacle of civilization and then revert back to the dawn? Or had

something, somewhere gone amiss in the evolution of mankind on the planet Mars? I wondered as I gazed at the savages approaching.

THEY came on in disordered ranks. I tried every method possible to show them that we desired no hostilities. They paid no attention to me. They jabbered on in a guttural tongue, surrounded the ship, and sized us up. I soon realized that they desired nothing but to possess my ship. I became infuriated.

Despite the fact that I had all the advantages, Woolson guns and a steel fortress against the Martians' strange weapons that looked like pendulums from huge clocks, I was on the verge of giving the order to shoot.

Tex put a hand on my shoulder when he saw how things were going with me. "Give me a chance, Captain. I might make them see things our way. After all, you can hardly blame them for taking the offensive. They might feel as if we have come to attack them. Even if they are savages, they have every right to defend their homes. Let me go out to them unarmed and with my hands above my head," Tex pleaded.

"You're a fool," I growled at him.

"You were once called mad for going Mars-way," he said quietly.

What was I to do in the face of an argument like that? I gave in to him, although I hated to. I ordered the bridge of a forward port to be lowered. Tex stepped from the ship.

With our hearts pounding, we watched Tex approach a group some hundred paces from the ship. He held his hands high above his head. A savage could see that he was unarmed. Yet somehow a nameless fear tugged inside of me.

Tex was about half way. The Red-devils jabbered incessantly. They pointed at him and then at the ship. There seemed nothing hostile about their attitude. Tex advanced slowly. Suddenly the group before him leaped apart. Each Red-devil spun on one foot. The pendulum weapon made a horizontal arc, there was a resounding "click" of release springs, and the next moment the air was filled with glittering, spinning metal discs. It all happened so swiftly, no man could have averted it. The speed and skill of the savages was remarkable. The destructive force of the pendulum weapons was amazing. Before the order to shoot even left my lips, Tex lay dead. His body was cut to ribbons. . . .

I became Mad Moor then. I leaped out upon the bridge, a Woolson gun in each hand sizzling death. Discs spattered around me and ricocheted from the steel hull of the ship. I was unmindful of the hail of death. I was determined to avenge the murder of Tex. . . .

For two hours, we fought. Most of the time was spent by the Red-devils in trying to get out of the crater. It turned out to be a death-trap for them, and we showed no mercy. By the horned Jooras, the crater became a lake of blood. When it finally ended, we were sick to the marrow of our bones from the stench of blood and the destruction we had done.

Our losses were four dead and thrice that number wounded. We all had a dozen wounds or more.

We spent a feverish twenty-four hours after that eventful morning. I was determined to get the compartment repaired. Dividing my men into two crews, I drove them relentlessly in two twelve-hour shifts. I breathed

happily when I saw the work done. The Black Comet was ship-shape for the return trip. I decided to make a hasty exploration flight around Mars and then head for space and home.

For eight days we skimmed the surface of the planet. We saw sights strange to us. The more we saw of Mars, the firmer grew the conviction within us that an intangible mystery surrounded it all. We came across the much-disputed "canals." They covered the greater part of the planet. They could hardly be called canals. The mammoth structures were built and raised above the surface of the planet. The perpendicular walls of transparent metal rose a mile high and were several miles in width. Within the clear waters we discerned buildings. Time and water had made ruins of them. The only life we saw was fish and small aquatic animals. It was beyond the realm of reason to associate these or the Red-devils with having any part in the building of this mass of super-structures. We called them "fish-tanks," for so they looked more than anything else, like the fish-tanks in any aquarium.

IT WAS in the afternoon of the eighth day, and incidentally our last one upon the planet Mars, that we stumbled on some extraordinary good fortune. We had landed The Black Comet on a plateau in the mountainous region of the northern hemisphere. Its desolation was ideal for us. Some minor repairs had to be made. We fell to our work in high spirits. We would soon be on our way home!

When the work was done, Crocker, Davidson and I decided to take a stroll. We were about a mile from the ship when Davidson, who was a mineralogist, stooped down and

picked up several lumps of ore. His eyes lit up and I asked him what was so interesting.

"Beryllium ore, Captain," he said, "richer than that found on the moon. And look, Captain," his hand swung in an arc to take in all of the plateau, "it's just laying around to be picked up."

I was excited then. The promise I had made Kensley would now be fulfilled beyond the expectations of all concerned. I sent Davidson back to the ship with instructions to stake a claim, as was customary in our day. I further instructed him that the claim was to be staked in the name of Howard Kensley. I was happy, lads. Our hardships and loneliness were somewhat being repaid. We had endured them beyond the limits that bordered an ordinary man's life. True, we had all done it willingly in the spirit of adventure. We knew what odds lay before us. Not one of us but felt that those who had made it possible to reach the goal of our restless souls, should now be repaid.

Diemos and Phobos skipped across the horizon as Crocker and I turned our tracks back to the ship. My companion suddenly gripped my arm. I followed his gaze. To the right of us, some quarter of a mile, we saw a strange sight. . . .

A lone figure, wrapped in a long cloak, was making its way slowly across the rock-strewn plateau. The cold night wind that blew down from the mountains whipped the folds of the cloak. The alien being held it tightly about its body. It seemed unmindful of us and the ship that lay but a half-mile away. We watched, fascinated. The slow walk became a stagger. The lone figure stopped as if the night wind were too strong a force to combat. It staggered several

paces and then crumpled to the ground.

"Come on," I shouted to Crocker as I commenced to leap. "Alien or savage, it is still human and in need of aid."

We found life in the strange being that lay at our feet unconscious from hunger or exhaustion. I threw it over my shoulder and headed for the ship. . . . That, lads, is how I met Ruk-Sara, who was later to become my first mate. He held that berth until you, Bob, saw him die not many nights ago.

Hours later we blasted off as Earth beckoned to us in the evening sky. We were on our way home to make interplanetary history!

As the days sped into weeks, not one of us but was glad that Ruk-Sara was in our midst. His intelligence was amazing. He learned to speak our language fluently in a month's time. Then passed days in which he whiled away the dragging hours with breathless tales of Mars and its history.

We learned from him that the Red-devils who had attacked us were a degenerate race whose ancestors had been slaves to a super-intelligent race, called the Osatasageez, the beautiful capital city of Mars today that Ruk-Sara and I founded nearly a half a century ago.

The Osatasageez were an aquatic peoples. They were in some respects shaped like the seals of earth, with shapely heads and pleasant features. They had tentacles instead of fins. Their graceful bodies were covered with soft white hair. Intelligently they developed in leaps and bounds until they enjoyed a civilization exceeding the earth's present day.

The Red-devils, or the Lookas, to use their proper name, were both aquatic and land beings. The Osa-

tasageez enslaved them for servile work. The Lookas were of a low mentality. Despite the environment that was theirs, they developed little above the savage plane. They were treated kindly by their masters.

The savage Lookas hated their intelligent masters. In generation after generation, the hatred smoldered. It bred many rebellions. Each one failed with dreadful losses on the side of the Lookas. The Osatasageez after each rebellion reduced the privileges of their slaves until the Lookas sweated under the strictest discipline for centuries.

THE last and greatest rebellion was a complete success for the Lookas because it had been planned long and well. They utterly annihilated the Osatasageez, and so for over two centuries nothing has remained of this once super-civilization but their handiwork; the "fish tanks" of Mars and the ruins of their once palatial homes in the depths of the clear waters.

At the time of the last rebellion, one of Ruk-Sara's great great ancestors had fallen in love with a noble daughter of the Osatasageez. This enlightened savage, when he saw that the doom of the Osatasageez was to be a certainty, took his beloved and fled to the isolated regions of the Bekke-Lo Mountains.

For two centuries, the offspring of the savage Lookas and the noble Osatasageez developed and increased, until they numbered many thousands. Three months before our landing, Ruk-Sara became king at the death of his father. Because of his intelligence, he was all Osatasageez although his outward appearance was almost entirely Lookas, except for the tentacles. He decided to win back his rightful heritage.

He formed a powerful army. It left its secret retreat in the mountains and came down to fight the Red-devils of the plains. City after city fell before his victorious army. He was on the eve of restoring his heritage when treachery defeated him.

There were many of his soldiers in whom the Lookas part of their nature predominated. Ruk-Sara had failed to foresee this. By these he was sold out. The major battle of the campaign took place and his army was cut to pieces. A pitiful handful managed to escape. He was one among the remnants. He hid by day and in the darkness of the night crept towards the mountains and his home. It was during this time that we found Ruk-Sara upon the plateau.

Ruk-Sara was to have his revenge. He and I were in that famous battle three years later when a united Earth army completely defeated the

Red-devils and colonized Mars. The few Lookas who escaped the destructive onslaught of guns and warplanes were put in the Kouun Basin. From this mile-deep crater there is no escape. The Red-devils live there to this day, fighting amongst themselves in a world of their own. . . .

Well, lads, you have heard the story of the Black Comet and the mystery of the "canals" of Mars and Mad Moor's first advent into space beyond the moon. I see the fingertips of dawn creeping over the mountain-tops. I am an old man now, and need rest. I remember a time when I tired from fighting and not words. It is still fresh in my memory. So come again, lads, and I'll tell you about it. I'll bid you a fair good-morning. . . .

THE END

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* * * *

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THE ETERNAL CONFLICT

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Dear Reader:

Hello, there! Remember the nice chats you and I had when I was Managing Editor of the old Gernsback Wonder Stories? Well, here I am again to talk over with you this business of science-fiction. I want "The Telepath" to be an informal get-together, where you and I can hold interesting conversations about science-fiction, the subject, and **SCIENCE FICTION**, the magazine.

During my lapse in editorship, I travelled about thirty thousand miles, covering every state in the Union and crossing the country six times. On these tours I visited many of you—authors and fans all over the nation, and I'm proud to number a great many science-fiction enthusiasts among my very best friends. While travelling, I also spoke of science-fiction to casual readers, and introduced it to many persons who were not familiar with this great literature.

All in all, I feel as though I have a fairly good idea as to what you, the fan, consider to be real science-fiction. With this conviction in mind, I hustled around to gather some top-cream manuscripts—which you have read in these first two issues of **SCIENCE FICTION**. So far, the letters I have received from you have been very encouraging, and I want you to keep on writing, telling me about your likes and dislikes. I need your suggestions and advice in order to provide you with the stories that you like best.

Of course, whenever I publish something that meets with your disapproval, I want you to toss all the brick-bats your heart desires—I can take it!

"The Telepath" will contain the

most interesting parts of the most interesting letters. I wish that space allowed me to use them all, but that's impossible, because there are so many of them.

So let's you and I have a chat! Write me a letter today and tell me what you think of **SCIENCE FICTION**, and how you think I can improve it.

CHARLES D. HORNIG
Care of **SCIENCE FICTION**
60 Hudson Street
New York City

P. S. How do you like the title **SCIENCE FICTION** for the magazine? I thought it would be best to call a spade a spade. After all these years, I thought it was about time somebody called a science-fiction magazine by its given name!

FIVE OF A KIND

Dear Sir:

*Am warning you that this is merely a women's (five of them) opinion of your new magazine. Somebody brought home a copy of **SCIENCE FICTION** last week and it has gone the rounds. We noted your contest announcement and decided to try a crack at it. If you did not know that women read scientific fiction, give a listen:*

*There are two housewives, an office worker, a high school girl, and a trained nurse among we five sisters and we all read **SCIENCE FICTION**, (when we could snag it away from brother and two husbands). With one accord we greeted your new magazine with whoops of glee and took turns curling up with the darn thing.*

We all read a good many "slicks" and quite a few "pulp," and we think you've got something there. Since we like our "pulp" to scare us, chill

THE TELEPATH

us, and give us to think, we go for **SCIENCE FICTION**. Looks like it might be going to fill the bill. It's going to keep me awake and give me goose-bumps when I'm on night duty (I'm the nurse) and the other four sisters say they expect to read it when the baby is cross or the teacher isn't looking or when the boss isn't in. (Don't think I'm trying to say we'll all buy a copy every issue. I wouldn't kid you.)

It is our opinion that scientific fiction should stimulate the imagination, open new fields for thought. We like the scientific facts or ideas to be based on things we know to be true. It isn't interesting to read two pages of wave electron emanation stuff with every other word a long-tailed hunt-the-dictionary one. All we care about is: did he bust the atom, pull the switch and get the girl? And if he did bust the atom and smear the villain, he needn't have gotten the girl to make it a good tale.

We read **SCIENCE FICTION** to help us picture what the world will be in years to come, or to get someone's idea of life in a different world. We know what present-day life is on this Earth. (It's a mess! And **SCIENCE FICTION** is about the only way we can forget that fact for a few minutes.)

As to the plots of science stories; keep 'em clean. If we wanted to read about "curving pearl-pink flesh, blushing dimpled cheeks and passionate pulsing buzzems" we could get a copy of one of the "Spicies." If you have to have a female in the picture, make her sensible. Let her know a few things about space-ships, heat-guns and such. Phooey on the huzzies who are always getting their clothes torn off and wailing an amorous eye at the poor overworked hero. If she's fitten to be in the story, she's gotta be a pard to the poor guy and give him a hand.

You'd be surprised how many women read magazines of this type. Even the pussy-cats who go for sticky romances make a grab for a copy when I'm dealing out magazines to the patients at our hospital. The nurses read them too, as I said, to

(Continued on Page 120)

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28x4.50-20	20	35	30x4.00	1.25	34x4.40	3.48	1.45
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DOUBLE ACTION GROUP

60 Hudson Street

New York City

SCIENCE FICTION

(Continued from Page 119)

keep awake and think of something besides a cranky patient. So how about giving us females a thought when you are picking tales for future issues? We like our men to be nice guys, maybe a bit bigger and handsomer than our real boy-friends, and our women we want to be nice guys, too, good-looking, but not soft. Sensible and good sports. (As we all imagine WE are.)

How about giving us a good reprint once in a while? Something like David Perry's "Scarlet Empire." (Don't know the fellow, so this isn't a plug.) With so much Communism and Socialism in the air, it should give pause for thought. (Look up a copy. All about the empire under the sea and a rank socialist getting a taste of what it's all about when he dove down under the glass dome of Atlantis.)

We voted on the stories in **SCIENCE FICTION**, Vol 1, No. 1 and decided "Martian Martyrs" by John Coleridge gets five O. K.s. Just enough scientific stuff to make it good. Ending new and logical.

"The Conqueror's Voice" by Robert Castle was second choice. Timely and fairly well-written.

"The Outlaw of Saturn" by John Cotton, and "The Valley of Pretenders" by Dennis Clive. Where are all the strange animals and vegetables that should be found on such stars? Make the hero fight a few hippogriffs.

"Under the White Star" by Edmond Hamilton and "The Sea Things" by Guy Arnold. Hazy, reads like the author was in a hurry to get the story pounded out. (The girl in "Sea Things" got some of her uniform ripped, and exposed her hide, tch, tch.)

"The Machine That Thought" by William Callahan. First part good—last part thin, too much science, not enough story.

"Death by Fire" by Amelia Reynolds Long. Good. It might happen and the people are real.

"Hazards of Space Flight." Filler at a dime a page.

All in all we like **SCIENCE FICTION** and would like to see a new

THE TELEPATH

issue at least twice a month. *Wishing you good luck and success. (And hoping to snag one of those prize subscriptions.)*

NAOMI D. SLIMMER

Box 146

Russell, Kans.

(It gives me great pleasure to start off "The Telepath" with such a breezy and informative letter as the above. It is a revelation to find five girls in one family so enthusiastic about our humble effort. I have received so many letters from women who read science-fiction, just lately, that I must confess many of the fair sex have well-developed imaginations. Their group has grown to such proportions that they must certainly be taken into consideration by the male adherents.

You seem to know your science-fiction as well as most fellows do, and your suggestions are helpful. I'm trying to keep the science in the stories from becoming too heavy, and will not let love interest dominate the tales.

I'd like to hear from other readers regarding the reprint question.—**EDITOR)**

HELLO, BRUCE!

Dear Charlie:

One finds it somewhat difficult to write to Editor of a pro-scientifiction magazine, when you spent the great part of the 1938 American Legion Convention with him in a most informal manner, laying around in Exposition Park in Los Angeles, for ten or more hours. However, I must write, at least.

I heard of and read **SCIENCE FICTION** some weeks ago, so it is little wonder that reports have come to my ears that the magazine sold out in Glendale within two days, and from what I've seen in L. A., it seems to be going pretty good.

Then, there's the 25-buck Essay Contest. I could write an essay that might come off with the \$25, but I happen to know only too well the editor's difficulties. You **KNOW** better than anyone else what your readers want, and you **KNOW** what

(Continued on Page 122)

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The Martian Flash

HUGO GERNSBACK, Editor

February 1939

Star Reporter Fips from the planet Mars transmits messages to Earth via a new process and interpreted only by the Radio-Records-Electronic-Space-Transformo. Sensationally, Fips reveals about re-lit-priced breakfast food how news broadcasts among Martians are received how Martians live on the Bio-fluid a life giving stimulant—how Scent Virtuoso's broadcasts thrill Martians—and many more disclosures about Mars.

Only HUGO GERNSBACK with his imaginative mind, could create the character "Fips." In **RADIO AND TELEVISION** February issue, new on all newsstands, appears this great serial "The Martian Flash." Get a copy of **RADIO AND TELEVISION** from your newsdealer, 25c the copy, or send your remittance to the publishers for your copy.

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SCIENCE FICTION

(Continued from Page 121)

kind of scientifiction is the best. Also, we both know how hard it is to give good stf. every month, because it just cannot be written. Good stf. is **GOOD** literature, and top hat books don't come out on the average of ten a month. However, I should tell **YOU** all this.

The one thing I didn't like on the cover is the phrase, **FANTASTIC STORIES OF THE FUTURE**. That's what the doubters always say: "Bah, just a lot of **FANTASTIC STORIES OF THE FUTURE**." Change the little catch phrase to something like "Scientific Stories of the Future," or something like that. The one bone, as you know, that the fans argue on is the fact that stories are not fantastical, and that they have a basis in practicability.

T. BRUCE YERKE
1207½ N. Tamarind Ave.
Hollywood, Calif.

(Thanks for your kind letter, Bruce — and notice that the **FANTASTIC STORIES OF THE FUTURE** head does not appear on this issue.

I'm glad you noticed the good sales of **SCIENCE FICTION** around Hollywood. It seems to be doing very well all over the country.

We did have a good time at the Legion convention, didn't we? Next time you write, tell me how all my science-fiction friends are around Los Angeles.—EDITOR)

THEORIES MUST BE PLAUSIBLE

Dear Sir:

Many stories now get clear away from the original idea. They are not what real scientific fans are seeking. We like stories built on known scientific elements—but better yet, stories offering plausible unknown scientific elements.

JOE THATCHER
New York City

(Whether the facts used in our stories are known or just theoretical, we feel, as you do, that they must always be plausible. A good story, above all things, must be realistic and believable.—EDITOR)

THE TELEPATH

"TO A LONG LIFE"

Dear Mr Hornig:

I am glad to see you back on the list of science-fiction editors. We fans have missed you since the old Wonder Stories changed hands. Here's to you and the new magazine. May you both have a long and happy life.

Get Paul to do some of the good-old-time covers, and don't forget to add a reader's department in the next issue or so, as no sci. mag should be without one.

ISAAC ASIMOV
174 Windsor Pl.
Brooklyn, N. Y.

(Many thanks for your kind regards. I hope that my long and happy life will be a busy one digging up good science-fiction for the fans.

I'm anxious to know what you think of Paul's cover illustration on this issue, and the make-up of "The Telepath."—EDITOR)

NEW IDEAS

Gentlemen:

I buy SCIENCE FICTION because it contains just what I want—stories with new ideas, new settings. When I sit down to read it, I want to be able to trip lightly through, and not have to stop every five minutes and vainly endeavor to follow some theory the author has on creation, evolution, the universe, or what have you. Let us have stories that stimulate the imagination, with just a small dose of science.

FRED E. WERNICKE
200 Commonwealth Ave.
Boston, Mass.

(It is our endeavor to give the science-fiction public a magazine of logic, scientific theory and fact, novelty, and human interest.—EDITOR)

A MICHIGAN CRITIC

Dear Editor:

I'm glad that Paul will be a permanent member of the art staff. I really think that it was Paul's illustrations that lured me in the first place to grab a copy of the pioneer s. f. magazine.

Edmond Hamilton's story contains this scientific *raison d'être*:

(Continued on Page 124)

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By JAMES ROURKE

SCIENCE FICTION

(Continued from Page 123)

For ages before the sun changed, Man had enjoyed the use of atomic power derived from the accelerated disintegration of radio-active elements.

And that's the only science in the story, no other reasonable background. I object. Perhaps, as thousands of stories have attested, atomic power is inevitable. But there must be some experimentation going on to-day which can be outlined in stories which use the atomic-power thesis.

Amelia Reynolds Long's "Death by Fire" is a detective story pure and simple. It doesn't belong.

"The Conqueror's Voice," by Robert Castle, is war propaganda; also, why wasn't the hero affected by the master hypnotist? Was his status as a hero enough to enable him to escape the curse, which even downed his chief, a man more intelligent than he? Also: There is no such thing as a U. S. "spy" division.

The rest of the stories are on a par with most other s. f. space-fillers.

SEYMOUR KAPETANSKY
1524 Taylor
Detroit, Mich.

(Just as an experiment, I went through a copy of SCIENCE FICTION with a black pencil, outlining science in the stories. If you do the same thing, you will be surprised at the amount of science in the stories that the authors have cleverly worked into readable, fictionalized form. We too want plenty of science in science-fiction, but nothing in technical or lecture form. The big point is to present science in a sugar-coated fashion, built into a fantastic or imaginative atmosphere.

If you read "The Conqueror's Voice" carefully, you will find that the hero saved himself from being hypnotized by recognizing the scientist's voice and breaking away from the spell before it got control of his thoughts.—EDITOR)

"LET IT GROW!"

Dear Charlie:

Nothing, in recent months, has made me happier than the advent of SCIENCE FICTION under your editorship. It is a fitting reward for the long years of service you have

THE TELEPATH

given to science-fiction. Here's hoping that it has a long and happy life. There have been many new science-fiction mags out lately, but I can truthfully say that your mag leads the race by miles.

By all means, Charlie, don't let the mag ever degenerate to the kindergarten class—let it grow with the minds of the fans. If the other mags want to play up to children, let them forge blindly on — but they won't carve a place for themselves in the hall of science-fiction like you certainly will if you keep plugging with the ideas you hold in mind for the future.

RAY BRADBURY
1841 S. Manhattan Pl.
Los Angeles, Calif.

(Well, Ray, with encouragement like that, I'll work my head to the bone to give you-all the very best in science-fiction, always! I'm trying to give the magazine an appeal to mature minds, and am therefore avoiding illogical fairy tales.—EDITOR)

OUR FIRST ISSUE

Dear Editor:

"Valley of Pretenders" by Dennis Clive and "Outlaw of Saturn" by John Cotton are two brilliantly outstanding tales among ten splendid yarns. These two have a dash of humanness, of realism that imparts to their bizarre settings a convincing smack of the authentic. John Cotton's George is an appealing feathered character, introducing agreeable touches of humor so naturally that our minds do not balk at his ponderous bulk and subhuman intelligence. Dennis Clive has created the same atmosphere in "Valley of the Pretenders" by introducing to us that inimitable pair, Sir Basil Emmot and Judge Asa Walbrook.

The asbestos-mammals of "Under the White Star," assimilating radioactive ores, are a little beyond the scope of my own imagination, perhaps because the familiar forms of life are comparatively soft and succulent and live by digestion of soft and juicy substances. Too long a leap into the unknown leaves one

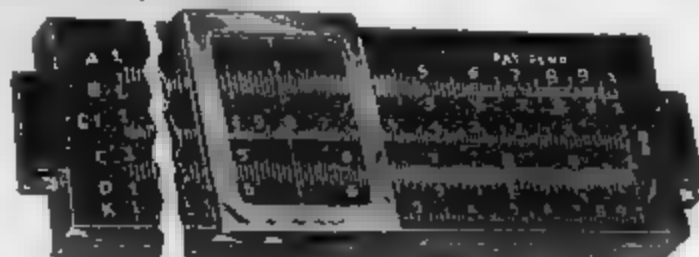
(Continued on Page 126)

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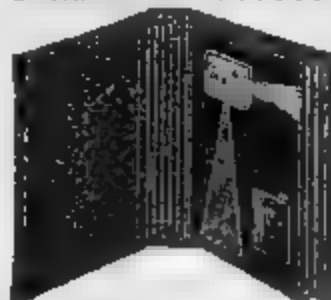
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SCIENCE FICTION

(Continued from Page 125)

a little dizzy. "Leeches from Space" left me somewhat the same feeling.

Thanks for "Death by Fire." Scientific crime detection has a legitimate place in this collection of tales. "Hazards of Space Flight" too, is a department that is certain of popularity.

Now that the science-story has emerged from its preliminary struggle for existence and has become a permanent part of our literature, it is bound to go on like a snowball down hill, gathering momentum and rolling up subscriptions on the way. This issue promises that **SCIENCE FICTION** may well become the leader in this specialized field.

GARFIELD HOFFMAN
 Elizabethville, Penna.

(Your comments on our first issue are very interesting. It is quite evident that you don't like your alien characters too super-mundane. The authors must have scientific explanations for queer or horrible creatures they introduce.

Reader reaction on "Death by Fire" has been very divided. Many object to detective stories in a science-fiction magazine.—EDITOR),

COLOSSAL!

Dear Editor:

I might state your present setup in one word: **COLOSSAL!**

I will not attempt to place the article in the class with the stories (*Hazards of Space Flight*) for I think it stands by itself. Give us more of them and on a variety of subjects as well chosen.

T. BAUER
 229 Saunders Ave.
 Louisville, Ky.

(I'm glad you like the non-fiction articles. I hope to run something of the sort in each issue of **SCIENCE FICTION**.—EDITOR)

Readers, what are your favorite stories in this issue? The favorites in the first issue were "Valley of Pretenders," "The Machine That Thought," and "Martian Martyrs." Why not transmit your thoughts via "The Telepath"?

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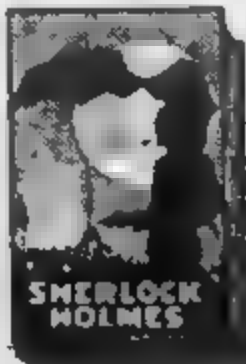
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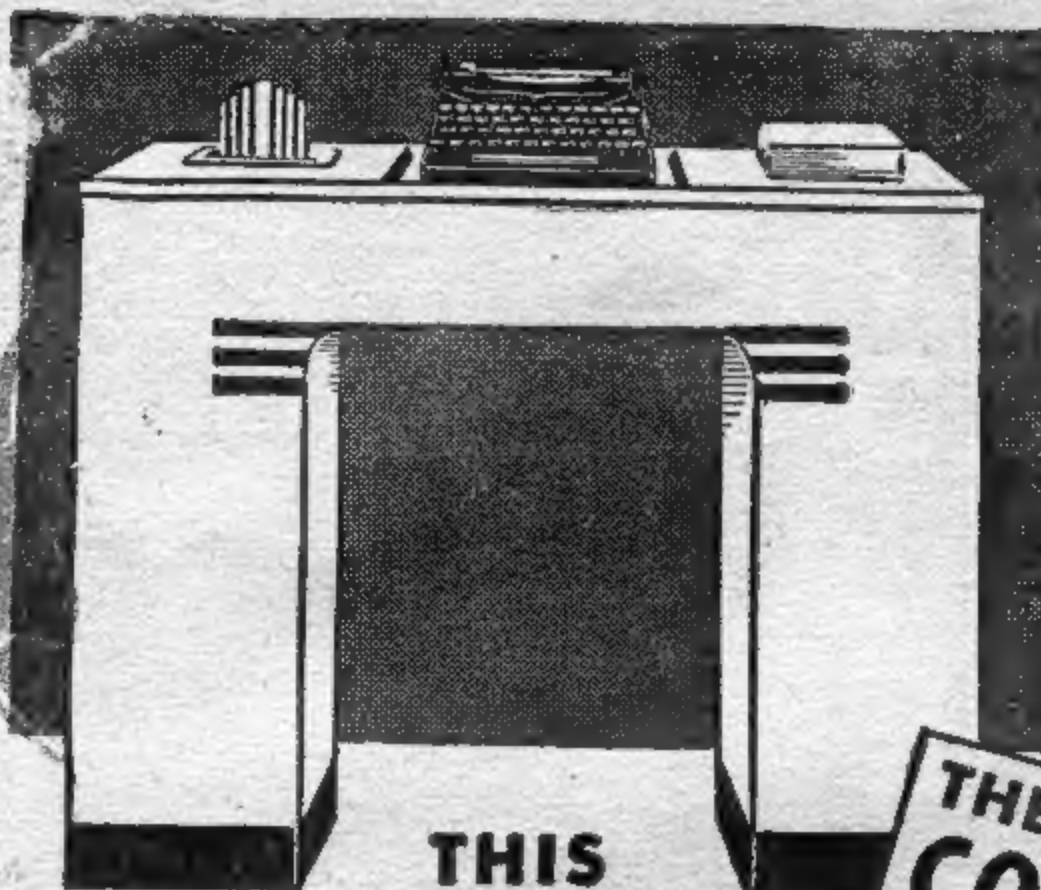
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